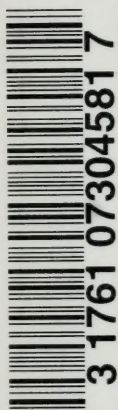
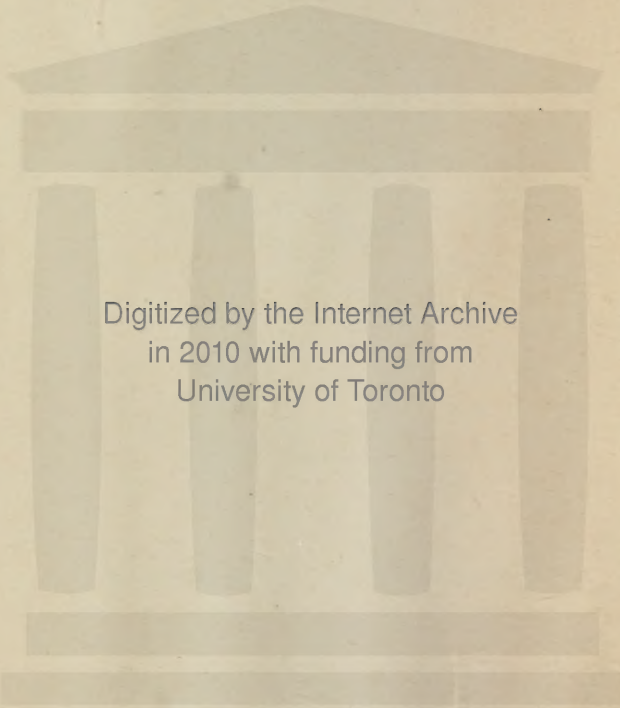


THE ART *of*
WRITING & SPEAKING
The ENGLISH
LANGUAGE

SHERWIN CODY



STORY-WRITING
& JOURNALISM



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**The Art of Writing and Speaking
the English Language**

**CONSTRUCTIVE
RHETORIC**

Sherwin Cody's Works

THE ART OF WRITING AND SPEAKING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Vol. I.—WORD-STUDY.

Vol. II.—DICTIONARY OF ERRORS (grammar, letter writing, words often mispronounced, words often misspelled, words often misused).

Vol. III.—COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC.

Vol. IV.—STORY WRITING AND JOURNALISM—Constructive Rhetoric : Part I. Literary Journalism ; Part II. Short Story Writing ; Part III. Creative Composition.

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Note.—The chapter on Business Letter Writing which was formerly Part I of Constructive Rhetoric is no longer contained in Mr. Cody's books, but in place of it "The Cody System—How you can Write Letters and Advertisements that will Pull" will be sent to owners of these sets on request of Sherwin Cody, director Corporation Training Institute, 139 West Madison St., Chicago.

THE ART *of*
WRITING & SPEAKING
The ENGLISH
LANGUAGE


SHERWIN CODY

v. 4^{'''}

STORY-WRITING &
JOURNALISM

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON

A faint, circular stamp of the University of Toronto is visible in the lower right quadrant of the page. The text "UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO" is partially legible around the perimeter of the stamp, which also features a central emblem.


Revised Edition.

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CONSTRUCTIVE RHETORIC

INTRODUCTION.

The first essential of a successful composition is that it interest the reader. This should be the sole object of all writing. Compositions that fail to interest are failures in every way. They have no practical utility or reason for existence.

Now for the average man or woman the standard textbooks on rhetoric fail in this first, great essential, because they are too theoretical, and theory is the very hardest thing in the world to get any ordinary person interested in. The men who write these textbooks have been from the time of Aristotle men whose lives are devoted to theory, and to teaching theory. They choose as their models of English the great theoretical writers. To them theory is the most naturally interesting subject in the world, and to write in a theoretical vein is to them the highest form of literary art.

Ordinary persons are not interested in theory. They are interested in pictures; they are interested in other men and women they can become acquainted with; they are interested in facts that will be of practical utility to themselves. In other words, to use the language of the theorists, the common reader wants the concrete.

There are three ways of writing an advertisement.

The advertiser may say, "We have the best store in town. Come to our store and you will be treated right. Nobody sells goods as low as we do." This is what might be called the general or theoretical method of advertisement writing.

A wiser advertiser will say, "We are selling 5 cent soap for 1 cent today, black taffeta silk worth \$1.50 a yard for 98 cents," etc. This is the concrete method in its simplest form.

Another advertiser may introduce the story-telling method, give a narrative of how John Jones came to his store and bought furniture for his four-room flat for \$100. It was all good furniture, and he is using it to-day. You may go to such and such a place and see it. His neighbor Henry Smith bought similar furniture at some other place for \$5 less, and he has spent \$50 replacing articles that have already worn out.

Whenever you can give the *human touch*, you grip the reader's interest with hoops of steel, and hold it to the end. The *human touch* is at the very antipodes of theory.

Perhaps the reader will now perceive that the best possible drill for an advertisement writer will be to study story-writing, since there he is most likely to catch the knack of the *human touch*. The newspaper writer will also discover that in a story he will find the best drill on light and sprightly conversation, which will help him to give his narratives of facts the *human touch*; or he will learn what are those nameless little acts of real people which touch the interest and hold the attention of common readers.

In Milwaukee they have had wonderful success in teaching a free use of language to children in the lowest grades of the public schools by telling them

stories which they are asked to retell in their own words. The children get interested in the stories, and the composition hour is no longer a dreaded grind. Rather it is the hour they look forward to all day long.

In high schools and colleges, too, story-writing is beginning to be recognized as a wonderfully effective form of composition drill.

The fact is, a story to be a good story must be realistic, concrete, and interesting. If it does not interest, we quickly find it out, and set it down as a failure. So by using the story as a composition drill we are most sure of maintaining the interest; just as we are most sure of being dry if we choose the theoretical disquisition style of the old fashioned "composition."

Again, the short story is so varied that it brings into use every power a writer has at his command. It is the most comprehensive composition drill that any one can invent.

The best possible language drill is to take a well written short story and rewrite it, book open before you, simply changing the scene, or one or two of the characters.

By trying to write a realistic story for yourself you come to know what are those little human touches that so affect the heart of the common reader, and so you are in a position to introduce them into advertisements, business letters, newspaper articles, or any thing you may write.

No man can write a purely theoretical drill exercise and be interesting; but one can write an actual business letter, on a business topic in which he is interested, and make it valuable even though it is an exercise. And that is what all exercises ought

to be—not mere theoretical compositions, but real, useful things, just as much as is the chair that the student furniture-maker constructs.

PART I

LITERARY JOURNALISM

Writing as a Profession. The number of persons earning a greater or less portion of their living by writing may be roughly estimated at a hundred thousand, who receive all the way from \$100 to \$15,000 a year. The latter sum is paid to a few of the leading editors. Now and then a novelist gets more than this in single years, and sometimes even through a series of years. The greater number of these writers are employed on newspapers and magazines, and while a part of their time is devoted to writing, the greater part of it is given over to the business of collecting news, or of editing, or of selling what has been written by themselves or others. Most of the money comes from getting information and selling it. Success as a writer usually depends on understanding this fact. This collecting and selling of information is commonly and broadly termed journalism, whether done through newspapers or magazines or books, though when the result is a book it is more often spoken of as "hack writing."

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Journalism is a profession, for any one with a fair amount of education and talent may enter it and attain moderate success, as in any other profession. Pure literature, however, cannot properly be looked on as a profession, for there is no certainty about it, and it is only the specially talented or lucky ones who ever get a living out of it.

The publication of a novel or short story by an unknown writer is almost entirely a matter of speculation. The publishers never know beforehand whether a book will sell or not. A magazine sells on its general reputation; but the editor never knows with any certainty whether or not a given story will please his readers. The most expert publishers have put forth with utmost confidence books that have been utter failures, and have refused books that have been the greatest successes. It is notorious that the best novels have been refused by scores of publishers before one could be found who would take the risk. Moreover, young girls with little or no education have written successful novels, while trained and educated men, after earning thousands of dollars by journalistic writing, have tried in vain to succeed in fiction.

The acceptance of a story by an editor is largely a matter of personal preference, or because the story is like some success of which he knows. When a certain kind of story seems to be popular, editors are anxious to get stories of

this kind, and will pay well for them. Success in selling fiction depends almost entirely on making a pleasing impression on the editor; and this is best done by studying his likes and dislikes and in catering to them. Some journalists have been extremely successful in catering to the likes and dislikes of editors, and in that they have made story writing a profession. Beyond that it is a matter of doing the best you can, and trying every editor in the country, one after another, till one is found to take a personal interest in your work. If he likes it he will give it a chance to come before the public, and if the public likes it its success is assured and future work from the same pen will be salable. A lifetime may be wasted, however, in trying to find the editor who approves and will give you the chance; and even then the public may fail to respond. I say, therefore, that as yet literature can scarcely be called a profession in so far as making a living out of it is concerned. It attracts thousands of people because it is a sort of lottery in which immense prizes are sometimes easily won, and every person who tries fails to see why he may not be the successful prize-winner. This speculative element draws into the ranks of would-be writers thousands of wholly incompetent persons, for whom there is not the slightest chance from the start. To succeed one must have a certain amount of practical literary training. By no means all who have this training will succeed as writers; but

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the more one has of it the more likely is success along journalistic lines if not in pure literature; and training of this kind is the best general culture.

Literature at its best must do one of two things, it must give the reader information which he will value, or it must stir up emotions in which he will take pleasure. The newspaper, with its information gathered from all parts of the world, is the best type of the former, and the stage, with its professional amusement, is the representative of the latter. To these we may add the church with its elevating emotions, and the three include the complete range of literature. Of these the simplest is that of collecting news, or information for which people will pay. We cannot help seeing here that the information is the thing, and we must really go out and get something which is worth something to somebody before we can hope to be paid for what we write. While the poorly written news report will not be accepted, it is necessary that the article be only fairly well written if the facts are there; and uninteresting facts are worth nothing at all, however well they may be written up. Cultivating the sense for news, being able to judge what the average man will find interesting, is the first step toward success in any kind of writing for money.

The News Sense. There is a correspondent in Washington who writes a two-column article every day, containing no current news, which

nevertheless is invariably filled with fresh information. He never talks with any man without getting some strange or curious fact that he can use in one of his letters. He goes about constantly to social functions where others are gossiping or wasting their time, but he is never wasting his. The very senseless gossip which he hears about him furnishes him with material for his articles. He is able to do this because he knows what people like to hear. He has the journalistic sense for news. Success in reporting requires this sense first of all. It can and must be learned, must be cultivated. It consists in knowing what people know already, and what the next little step of information is for them; for every new fact must be hitched on to one the reader already has.

For example, everybody knows what type and paper and printing are, and these general facts about the government printing office are not interesting. But most people do not realize what a vast amount of matter is turned out each year. Go over to the government printing office and find out how many thousand tons the books that are printed would weigh, how many carloads or trainloads they would make, how much it costs the postoffice department to carry them free in the mails, etc. Incidentally notice that the women working as printers get the same pay as the men, namely \$4 a day, or \$24 a week. Comment on the fact that in spite of this large pay, and that they stop work every day at half-past

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four, many of them live up to every penny they earn and get into debt. From this go into the subject of the lending companies, the exorbitant interest they charge, the ease with which they give credit, and the subtle ways in which they go about getting money from their victims.

These are all easily accessible facts. Any one may go and get them, if he only knows what is interesting and what is not. But the person who does not know might go to an ordinary printing office and say that the women got only half what the men did, and worked for \$9 a week. This would not be news, because nobody cares about it. But when a woman doing that kind of work gets \$24 a week, here is something remarkable, here is news. That a person earning \$9 a week is always in debt is not news, for that is what every one would expect; but that the person earning \$24 a week is in debt just as much as the one earning \$9 is a strange and curious fact. Things that are as people think they ought to be have no news value; things which are contrary to what they expect, and pertain to a subject close enough to their everyday life, afford material for a real news story. And usually the writer must go out and be astonished by finding something he himself did n't expect, before he can make an interesting article for others.

It is a curious fact that it is immensely more difficult to write a good news article about a subject of which you yourself know much, than about

a subject on which you are looking for information as well as everybody else. I myself once wrote a book on how to run a steam engine (published anonymously), and though I had never touched a steam engine in my life, my book at once took precedence in popularity over all the other books on the market written by experts, and was adopted in colleges as a standard textbook. I took all the material that the professional engineers had gathered, and wrote it up from my own point of view, that of the novice and learner. As a novice I could judge better what was interesting and helpful to a learner than the professional could, who knew everything about the subject, but indeed knew too much.

How to Write a News Story. In a piece of fiction it is usually considered important to hold back the great facts until you can work up to them by degrees. But in a news story you should invariably state the most important fact you have in the very first sentence, and in the simplest possible language. Suppose you are reporting a fire: begin by saying, "There was a fire last night at 210 F St., which did \$10,000 worth of damage." Or suppose some one was killed. That is more important than \$10,000 worth of damage. Begin your story: "Edward Barnum, a fireman, was killed last night while fighting a fire at 210 F St." Then go on to tell just how he was killed. When this part of the story is disposed of, you ~~may~~ tell briefly how much damage the

fire did. Lurid description or fine language serves only to make the reader irritated, since he wants to know the inside facts. An ordinary man and a reporter go to a fire. Both stand on the outside and see the smoke, the fire engines, the water, the flames, and the officers. If the reporter did nothing but look on as the ordinary man does he would have no story. He may not see the fire at all if he can find somebody who will tell him to whom the building belongs, what kinds of goods were stored in it, how the fire started, what was done about trying to put it out, and with what success, and what the loss was and what the insurance. Instead of looking at the fire, the good reporter rushes off to find somebody who will tell him these facts—for nearly everything that a reporter knows, somebody tells him.

In writing a news story a reporter must know in advance about how much interest the general reader will have in it. In the first few lines he will tell the great and main facts. Then he will go on and give the minor details. If the main fact is a very astonishing or important one, he will give a column of details; if it is a \$10,000 fire in a great city where \$100,000 fires are frequent, he will give it only a few paragraphs or "sticks." If the \$10,000 fire were in a small town where such a catastrophe had not happened in ten years, the good reporter would give a whole page to it. If he knows his business he will gauge to a nicety the reader's interest, and give

him details just as long as he will want to read them. Another thing that affects the length is what other news stories there are in the paper; for if there are several other very interesting items of news, the attention of the reader will be sooner be drawn away to these other things.

Usually the good reporter will get much more information than he can use, and he will begin by telling the most important things first, and then give the less important details, until he feels he has given as many as the reader's interest will stand. But sometimes, often indeed, details have to be manufactured to supply the craving for news. When Port Arthur fell the actual news was contained in three lines, but most of the papers, especially the big city dailies, had two or three pages of additional information, all taken from what was common information already. But the tremendous excitement which this event produced would make the reader plow on through three great newspaper pages, and it was the business of the newspaper editor to keep him supplied with matter till his excitement wore off.

This is the point at which the imagination is called on in news reporting. Since the writer has no facts to give, the next best thing he can do is to tell what may have happened, or might have happened, or was probably going to happen. Taking all the facts together and studying them carefully, he comes to a reasonable conclusion as to what other things must have been true. In the

same way the scientist reconstructs the mastodon from a single bone. At the time of the Charleston earthquake the editor of the Mail and Express in New York learned that all communication with Charleston had been cut off. He came to the conclusion that there had been an earthquake. Immediately he set about writing the story of this earthquake as it must have happened. He showed a great picture of the city with the chimneys toppling over. Those who were informed of what he was doing ridiculed him. But hours afterward the real story came in much as he had guessed it, and he had the honor of having scored one of the great "scoops" of the age. This was an exceptionally bold stroke; but what this man did in a large and dramatic way, every news writer must do constantly in a small way. He must constantly fill in his knowledge of what has happened by his judgment of what must have happened. If he is a good reporter his guesses will be as good as his observation.

The excitement in being able to get these facts and arrange them properly in one's own mind, and filling in any lacking details that can be supplied by deduction, usually enables one to write the story out in good, forcible, simple English, such as the fluent talker who is thoroughly interested would use in telling the story *viva voce*. This is the test. English that is not simple and natural enough to talk, or read aloud in the family circle, is not good enough for a news story. The story

should be written rapidly and under the excitement of intense interest. If time permits it should then be carefully and thoughtfully revised. The preliminary training will determine the accuracy with which rapid writing will be done.

The Magazine or Feature Article. While the ranks of the story writers are overcrowded, there is nearly always a sale for special articles for Sunday papers or monthly magazines. People think they can write stories out of their heads; but they know they must go and hunt up information for special articles, and that requires an effort they are unwilling to make.

To be good a special article should be timely, and if possible illustrated. A fairly well written article that is both timely and illustrated can be sold with the utmost readiness.

In order to make articles timely, the writer must watch the newspapers and select subjects that are attracting attention. For example, when the Boxer trouble broke out in China a good special article writer would have hurried to the Celestial quarter of any large city and by making friends with the Chinamen tried to find out what the Boxer society was. A detail here and a detail there would have been gleaned, probably. Then he would have gone to the public library and found out what information books contained. For illustration he would first try to buy photographs and prints. In rare books at the library he would have found prints which he might photograph, and

which would serve an artist in making sketches. With his camera he might collect some photographs in Chinatown, of modern American Chinese, which he would label Boxers, if in his judgment they looked just as the Boxers would look.

In missionary papers and books, accounts would be found of massacres by Chinese and other heathen people, and vivid recitals of these would make a good special article at such a time.

Even an article on local Chinatown, with photographs the writer could take with his own camera, would probably be good just then.

I myself prepared anonymously at this time a history of the Chinese Empire, past and present. It was largely reprint from standard uncopyrighted English works, revised and brought down to date. The manuscript was prepared, put in type, and printed, within seventeen days, and the book was on the market.

Newspapers want local articles, which need not be timely. Perhaps a dilapidated old man lives in a shack on the outskirts of the town, and has lived there for some years. An article about him with photographs would sell readily to a local newspaper, if it were well written.

It is difficult to sell anything to a newspaper by mail. A personal call on the editor is usually essential to doing business.

Magazine articles must be more carefully written and more dignified than newspaper articles,

and must be of interest to all the people to whom the magazine goes.

Nine-tenths if not ninety-nine hundredths of all the special articles published are written to order. It is therefore well to find an editor who thinks he wants an article on a given subject before writing it, and then prepare it so that it will meet his ideas of what it ought to be. An article prepared in advance and sent in by mail may be rejected simply because in some slight particular it does not please the editor. If one can come in personal contact with him, one can find out exactly what is wanted and prepare the work accordingly, get it accepted, and get a good price for it.

My first pupil had collected for her club some material on how refined girls might earn money. This she wrote out in story-like form and offered to the editor of the Century. He said he didn't like the last part, but thought perhaps he could use a few paragraphs of the first part in the small type at the back of the magazine. The lady thought this was a rejection (something to which she was well accustomed). I assured her, however, that it was an acceptance. She went to the editor, found out what he objected to in the last part, rewrote that portion of the article, and got \$75 for it, whereas her friends who had had stories accepted got only \$50.

It will be seen that even in magazine articles

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journalism is, if anything, more a matter of business than of writing.

Book Reviewing. Reviews of books for newspapers or magazines are seldom paid for, and they cannot be written by one who has not read widely and kept abreast of current publications. But it affords an excellent practical drill for any college man or woman, or other person who has long been an habitual reader. The person who reviews a book usually gets the book in payment for his work. Bookstores will generally pay half price for a good book, and it is not uncommon for an industrious reviewer to earn \$5 to \$10 a week in this way. I know one man who reviews the same book for two or three different papers, one a daily, one a weekly, and one a monthly, getting three copies of the book. One reading of the book serves for all, and the actual writing of the reviews takes but little time. In this way he makes regularly \$20 or \$25 a week out of the sale of his books.

Book reviewing is an art like any other kind of writing. As I have already said, the reviewer must be well educated, widely read, and possessed of a fluent and correct literary style. When he receives a book for review he will first of all study carefully the style of reviews that appear in the paper for which he is going to write, and ask the editor how long a review he wants of this particular book. Then he will look over other current papers to see what other reviewers have said. Finally he will read the book all through carefully.

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This will usually take two or three days. After laying the book aside for a few days more, he will write out his impressions rapidly and lightly in the space assigned.

This can usually be combined with other work, and two or three books a month may be reviewed in this careful way as preparation for more rapid work.

After a time the reviewer will begin at the first page and read any new book with the utmost care for perhaps ten pages. In these ten pages he will find that the author has exhausted himself, and if the book is a novel all that remains is to glance along to the end to get the plot. Some books require reading for only ten lines; others have to be read fifty pages; still others, few in number, have to be read all through. By following this method I myself once reviewed five hundred novels in one year (practically all that were published), in connection with other active duties.

Books not novels can often be reviewed from the title-page and table of contents, without reading more than a sentence here and there.

In writing a review, think always of the person who is going to read it. He wants to know what a book contains, so that he may decide whether it is one he would like to buy or not. The opinions of the reviewer are of small moment. News information is what the editor usually wants in his notices.

There is a method of reviewing which such accomplished journalists as W. T. Stead, T. P. O'Con-

nor, and other English writers have brought to perfection. They take the interesting information books, and quoting paragraphs freely, make intensely fascinating special articles which are rather better worth reading than the book itself. Such books are the diary of Boulanger who threw away a great political opportunity and committed suicide for love of a woman, volumes of memoirs with interesting anecdotes, etc. Success in this sort of reviewing requires a well developed and keen news sense, and a delicate knowledge of what the reader will find interesting. Everything of a formal or perfunctory character, all personal opinions, or logical summaries, are sacrificed to the news interest. Usually the vanity of the reviewer is so excited by his position of judge and critic that he sacrifices human interest to airing his own views.

Compiling Useful Books. The "hack writer" is merely a journalist who is occupied in making books instead of newspaper articles. Of course to write a book is a much more serious matter than writing a book-review, for example, or a short article. Book-reviewing and special article writing furnish the preliminary training for book-making. Besides, books are published only in the large cities, while every town with a daily paper furnishes a field for the book-reviewer. Book-making is the more comfortable and better paid higher form of journalism into which the literary journalist graduates. The active news-gatherer is bet-

ter paid than any book-maker, however, and looks with contempt on the poor "hack." Many of these compilers of books are old newspaper men who have become worn out in their profession.

Very little original material is used in book-making. For the most part book-compiling is done from other books and old magazine files. Salable books are usually of a practical character—Manual of Carpentry, Handbook of Blacksmithing, How to be Your Own Shoemaker, or the like. I have already referred to a history of China which appeared just as the Boxer troubles were exciting popular interest. People began to talk of jiu-jitsu, or the Japanese system of boxing, and of course a book on that subject was demanded by those who wanted to learn the system. When the Russian-Japanese war broke out a book descriptive of the Japanese people, and especially of the Japanese army, or the Japanese navy, was at once prepared by several publishers. Had the cause of Russia been more popular, a book on Russia, especially on Siberia and Manchuria, would have been a good thing; but the unpopularity of the Russian cause to some extent destroyed the commercial value of such a book.

Books of this kind originate usually with the publisher, who as a business man sees an opportunity to sell the work. He thereupon orders some hack-writer to prepare it. It is usually best to go to the publisher and suggest the book, and get a virtual order before doing any work upon it.

Of books made to order, there are not only handbooks or manuals, but also a great many schoolbooks. These are nearly always prepared under the direct supervision of the publisher, who employs a number of persons upon each book. In this work teachers of course always have the preference; but any one possessed of a simple and natural style, suited to children, may engage in rewriting classical stories, biographies, etc., for supplementary reading. Work of this kind must be done with great correctness, however, and along very rigidly fixed lines.

Subscription books afford a wide field of employment for the hack-writer, and do not require nearly as careful preparation as other kinds of works. These include compilations of the best poems, essays, orations, etc., biographies, histories, and reference books of various kinds.

Work of this sort must be done with extreme rapidity to be especially profitable, for \$50 is not an unusual price for a small handbook. Practised writers have turned out three or four volumes a month, which would take the unskilled writer six months each. Though done so rapidly, there must be no glaring errors. Success depends on an alert and well developed sense of what the public will want and find readable and useful, or what will appeal to the average man or woman.

Juvenile Fiction to Order. There is one kind of fiction which is largely written to order, and is not so speculative as novel and short story

writing. That is the juvenile short story, serial, or book. The language is the simplest and most direct possible. The whole interest centers in the exciting situation, and success depends on finding or inventing a series of adventures possible to a boy or girl (usually a boy), which will be sufficiently exciting. For instance, a young man I knew who did this kind of work imagined a boy whose father was rich enough to buy him an island in the Pacific ocean. Of this he made himself emperor. After a time he thought it would be more exciting to appoint himself the ambassador of his kingdom to the United States, and he had a long series of experiences in Washington. Another boy stowed away on a battleship and was with Dewey at the battle of Manila. To write stories of this kind one must read up on geography, the customs and manners of strange peoples, etc. The first element essential to success is the simple, juvenile style, with a sense of what the boy will find interesting; and the material is obtained as the hack-writer gets his compilations.

Booklet Writing for Advertisers. The advertising columns are coming to be written in better style than the reading columns, and an advertising booklet is nearly always better paid for and more carefully constructed than a newspaper or magazine article. All the art of a story writer is called into use, and the highest literary skill is often well rewarded.

Any special information connected with a great

business may be used as the basis for a little book, the object of which is to carry out-and-out advertising. The literary journalist may leave the out-and-out advertising to the regular advertisement writer, but the literary portion he can prepare much better than the business man. Here is a growing and valuable outlet for the person who would earn money at the point of the pen.

Just what this work is I can best illustrate by referring to an experience of my own.

I had charge of building a small country house for a friend. First I wrote three articles for a popular building magazine, telling just how I did it. The same matter I rewrote in a little different form and sold to a Sunday newspaper. From each I got \$50 for my articles. Then I put all the matter together and filled in my detailed list of materials from the pricelist of a great supply house. This made it a valuable advertising booklet, for which I got \$75—more than from either the magazine or the newspaper.

Advertisement booklet writing is a field for the literary journalist which pays well, yet is very little worked. It is more or less a recent development; and few persons of literary training have yet tried to study the needs of the business man.

Literary Journalism as a Training for Literature. The great failing of nearly all would-be producers of literature, and of many more or less successful, is a lack of the news sense, or rather ignorance of what the average human being wants

and will pay for. It goes even deeper than this. It is ignorance of the human heart that renders all efforts to appeal to human beings futile and abortive. A profound and universal sympathy is the basis of all great successes—such as those of Shakspeare, Scott, Dickens, Balzac. These men got their sympathy for the world and their knowledge of it by being forced into it in a business way. The writer who shuts himself up in his study and feeds on books alone gets into a sentimental atmosphere that enervates him and blinds him to the real truth about him. Hardship and contact with the world, such as is inevitably the lot of the literary journalist, I believe to be the greatest and most essential preparation for the highest literature. Those who shrink from being forced into the world, and into contact with people, where they must meet the keen stress of competition, and seek in literature an easy and polite way of making a living, richly deserve to fail, as they inevitably will.

Literary journalism has its dangers as well as its advantages. It is likely to produce habits of haste and carelessness, disregard of the fine points of literary art, and an abnormal respect for the ephemeral and sensational. Nearly all journalistic work is superficial. It is for a day and no longer. A newspaper dies the day it is born, a magazine lasts only a month. These periodicals do not care to spend money for qualities which make a literary work enduring; but that is the very quality

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which differentiates literary journalism from literature. The only essential difference between the two is that the one is for the moment only; the other is for the moment and for the future also. This means that literature is literary journalism done with more care, more thought, more profound sympathy, a wider truth, a finer art. But these are really deep-seated qualities of the heart; and the person who possesses them will inevitably rise through the superficiality of literary journalism to the enduring and noble qualities of a literature that will live.

PART II

SHORT STORY WRITING

Introductory.

The short story offers the best possible illustration of the general principles of effective *construction* as applied to a whole composition. The possibility of teaching story-writing as a creative art will be considered later. Quite apart from that question, however, the study of the short story may be taken up by those who wish to test and perfect any native talent they may have; but it is also especially recommended to all students of the language as affording the best training in actual composition. Its style is comprehensive of all other styles; its relation to thought about human nature is such that the study of the story gives us a key invaluable in any dealings with our fellows, and suggests the secrets of success even in newspaper and advertisement writing. We have omitted the usual discussion of whole compositions as commonly presented by writers on rhetoric, since it was not apparent that it would have any practical value. Whatever might have been said under that head will be found in this analysis of the short story.

CHAPTER I.

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF STORIES.

All short stories may be divided into five different classes. They are:

1. Tale, a story of adventure or incident of any sort like the stories of the Arabian Nights, or the Decameron; 2. Fable or allegory, a tale with a direct moral, like Hawthorne's short stories; 3. Study, in which there is a descriptive study of some type or character or characteristic, as, for instance, Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert," or Irving's "Sketch Book;" 4. Dramatic Sketch, a story whose value depends on a clever dramatic situation, or a dramatic statement of an idea, like Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger?," Poe's "The Gold-Bug," etc.; 5. Complete Drama, like Maupassant's short stories. The complete drama combines all the elements found in other kinds into a single effective story. It tells a tale; it has a moral, though one usually more remote than the allegory; it has a study of character (for the dramatic cannot exist without a character more or less well developed to be dramatic); and it usually suggests some problem of life, or has some clever turn or unexpected episode or climax. Of course it is the hardest thing in the world to combine all these elements into one perfect whole, as Maupassant does, but the mere combination itself has powers and produces effects which would have been utterly impossible to the various ele-

ments uncombined. The combination produces a new quality which belongs wholly to itself. So this fifth sort of story is much more than the mere sweeping into one bundle of all the other kinds.

In practical study we should begin with the Tale, because to be able to tell a plain, straightforward story well is the beginning of the very highest art, and the narrative style is verbally at the bottom of all story-telling. The Fable is less important practically, because the moral of a story usually takes care of itself. From the Study we learn the descriptive style, next to the narrative the most important to the story-teller. The Dramatic Sketch may be left out of view until the end of our study, because the dramatic can never be effective until one has mastered narration and description, and then to those who have the dramatic instinct it comes naturally. Such cannot help working toward a climax of some sort, and others will content themselves with the less ambitious tale or study.

We shall always work from the point of view of the Complete Drama, however, for it is the combination of elements toward which we should strive, it is the perfect goal.

CHAPTER II.

OUTLINE OF THE GENERAL METHOD OF
WRITING SHORT STORIES.

Most short stories belong in varying degree to each one of the five classes we have mentioned. If narrative predominates, it is a tale chiefly, though all the other elements of moral, character study, and so forth may be present; if description predominates, you call your story a study. The character of the subject in hand must determine these points. In discussing the typical short story, however, we will take the balanced whole as illustrated by Maupassant's stories, and from this type each writer can make such modifications as his own subject demands.

The course of procedure in setting about the writing of a short story may be as follows:

1. First, one must have a striking idea, situation, or trait of character, and only one. Few people can sit down and evolve a situation out of their heads. They must hit on it accidentally in some way, and it must be very simple, or it will not be completely developed in a short story. The length of a story should be the same as the bigness of the idea, no bigger and no smaller, and to make a story longer or shorter than just as long as the idea is to spoil the story.

2. Having an idea, our author sits down to write his story, and he is very likely to fix his attention on some general idea in space. But

that is fatal. He must have something definite to look at. Observe Maupassant in "The Necklace." He begins: "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks." Now this story is only eighteen hundred words long, but Maupassant uses up about three hundred at once in describing this woman. He tells how she dressed, what sort of things she had in the house, what she wished she had, what sort of man her husband was, what they had for dinner, her dreams and hopes. You feel well acquainted with her, as if she were your next-door neighbor. And all the rest of the story is about this woman, what happened to her, how she was delighted and disappointed. Her husband is hardly mentioned after the first. It is a story about this woman who has interested you, and everything is left out but her experience.

3 Having a right start, it is not difficult to go straight ahead to the end successfully, in a simple and natural manner. But still it is often puzzling to know what to select and what to reject of the many things that may present themselves to the mind. The invariable rule should be, put in nothing that has not a bearing on the catastrophe of the story, and omit nothing that has. It is a great temptation, if one has a fine moral sentence, an apt phrase, or a terse anecdote or observation, to put it in just where it occurs to the mind. But the artistic story-writer will sacrifice absolutely everything of that sort

to the immediate interest of the story. That is to him everything. But apparently trivial details that are in the thread of the story must be put in. In "The Necklace," Maupassant tells how the wife tore open the letter of invitation, how she looked when she read it, what she said and what her husband answered; then how she went to get the necklace, what her friend said and what she said. But you will notice that he sticks closely to the woman of whom he is telling the story. Everything about her is of interest. Nothing else is.

4. The secret of giving strength to a story is in a clever use of contrasts. A story that has been true to the preceding injunctions will be a correct story, but it will probably be weak unless it has strong contrasts in it, and to make strong contrasts one must match one description against another in each detail. In "The Necklace," notice the skilful contrast in the latter part of the story of what Madame Loisel actually did with what in the first part of the story she wanted to do. She wanted luxuries, servants, a fine house; but they dismissed the servant they had, rented a garret under the roof, etc. Each fact in the last part is matched with a corresponding dream in the first part. Then at the very end of the story, her friend, who is rich, and still remains young, with smooth, white hands, is brought face to face with Madame Loisel, who has grown coarse and rough. This constant and skilful use of contrast and cross contrast makes the real strength of Maupassant.

5. But everything should tend to the bringing out of a single idea or particular thought of some kind, without which the story is valueless. The reader expects some pertinent conclusion, and if he does not find it he says the story is a failure, and when he has gotten the essential idea he does not care to read further. He may read on to the end out of curiosity to see if anything more does happen. But if there is nothing more he is disappointed. In the story of "The Necklace" Maupassant does not hint at his real idea until the very end, and when he has said the supposed necklace is paste he stops short. The reader says to himself irresistibly, "Oh, the irony of fate!" and he is ten times more pleased than if Maupassant had said it himself, though no one could doubt he was thinking it all the time he was writing the story.

CHAPTER III.

MATERIAL FOR SHORT STORIES.

The collection of material is the first work of the short story writer, and it is a matter of great importance. Many young writers imagine that they have only to think over their experiences and write a story on almost any idea that may come uppermost in the mind. Nothing could be more erroneous. A short story writer who is going to make a serious success will have to make a business of getting his material, as well as a business of writing his stories.

Odd as it may seem, while a writer should know his subject thoroughly, he should not try to write on a subject that is too familiar. A subject that is fresh to the writer, and has real interest for him, is far more likely to prove fresh and interesting to the reader; for we always write with more zest about that which interests us. So we must not know so much about a subject that our interest in it has evaporated.

But where shall I look for material for a good story? the student will ask.

The best place to look is the files of the daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals. Curious and suggestive things are constantly happening in real life, and some one is sure to report them. An actual incident from real life is by far the best basis for a strong story. It is not enough, for the writer must add his own personality and his art; but it is an excellent beginning.

This is the way in which a great number of the stories of the Decameron were obtained. Boccaccio did not originate a single one, but simply wrote out with skill those he heard at taverns as he journeyed about. The best of these had come, in turn, from real incidents. They were tavern gossip. Yet it took Boccaccio's skill to tell them in such a way that they would live, and without doubt they had received countless alterations and additions in their progress from mouth to mouth. But at the bottom, after all, there was a little bit of history.

The next question that arises is, How will you

know what will make a good story? The newspapers are filled with incidents, and we must have some standard for selection.

In the first place, the would-be writer must understand his audience, and know what it would like. A good idea for a story should suggest some new notion, or give a fresh impression. The struggle of humanity is to get out of itself, either for relief or in the struggle to be better or to know more. In order to write a good story, then, it is necessary to be informed concerning what the prospective reader knows and what he does not know, and what he wants to know; for what is old and commonplace to you may be fresh to another, and likewise (do not forget) what is new and fresh to you may be perfectly familiar to many another.

The majority of writers do not truly understand their audience. If successful, it is usually because they have stumbled on something that has happened to prove interesting. While they stick to that one line they are read: if they try some other, they often fail, because they do not really understand the conditions of success. They are indebted to mere luck, not to conscious art.

The simplest idea for a story is a mere narrative of some queer thing that has happened in some other town or neighborhood—in Paris, in China, or “down South,” or “up North.” But there is also the world under our feet and above our heads. Queer things are happening all around us if we have eyes to see them as queer or interesting events.

The ideas that one finds under his feet (or, to be literal, let us say in any daily paper we may pick up), do not usually come by mere luck: they are the result of skill and long study, and if a man does get at them he proves himself so much the brighter than his fellows. The truth is, they are in ourselves, and the commonplace incident in the paper merely helps us to fix our thought upon something we have been unconsciously carrying about with us perhaps for years.

If one wishes to write about sentiment, or the secrets of life, that is, stories of human interest, he will find that the most effective ideas for a story are such as determine the entire course of some human life. An idea is good in proportion as it concerns some event that determines a man's happiness or unhappiness. Such ideas are the basis for each of Maupassant's stories. The incident that Maupassant narrates is the one great determining incident in the life of his principal character, and when that has been told there is absolutely nothing more of interest to say about that person. This is clearly seen in "The Necklace," which is the story of the tragedy of Madam Loisel's life. Her life is completely altered by the event of the loss of the necklace.

But the incident is of no value unless it means something. For practical purposes we must select such incidents as we can make use of to illustrate principles of life. We must be able to match each event we find in the world with some knowl-

edge of the heart or of human existence which is peculiarly our own, which we have learned from experience. If one has a large stock of experience, it will be easy to find good incidents out of which to make stories; but if one's experience is small, the search must be longer and more disappointing.

If we examine the great short stories of literature we shall find that each throws some faint light on our knowledge of the action of the human heart, or on the mystery of human life, or at any rate makes us think to some purpose on these subjects. Each idea is astonishing, or unexpected in itself, that is, it is new; nevertheless, though we are astonished at the idea, we see how natural it is the moment we comprehend it, and that makes it all the more astonishing.

In a story like that of "Patient Griselda" we have a simple narrative. Probably something resembling the treatment that the Marquis of Saluzzo accorded his wife was a matter of history. But to develop the story the author had to know something of the customs of the people of which he writes, so that the events he narrates would be true to life; then he had to select what commonplace and ordinary details were necessary to make the whole picture complete without burdening it with anything superfluous. And when the story is finished it is of interest because it illustrates what a woman may do, and what motives do, and what motives ought to govern her. In fact it suggests universal problems, which

even after five hundred years are still interesting. We also note that Griselda is an unusual woman. It is far easier to make a good story about an unusual woman than about an ordinary one.

As a rule, romance is based on possibility. Given such and such circumstances, let such and such events happen. Under such conditions, what would the characters we have chosen do? The conditions assumed may be actual, as in historical romance, so that we cannot tell in reading a story what actually did happen and what is imagined by the writer as a possibility; or the conditions with which we start may be frankly admitted to be imaginary, as in the case of genii of the Arabian Nights, or the absurdities of modern burlesque or comedy. But in any case, granted the existence of genii, or any other thing we may desire to start with, everything else must be developed strictly according to the requirement of nature. There is no letting the imagination run riot, or the whole value of the story is destroyed. The truth, the knowledge of life, is in every case the thing that counts.

A story like Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face" is an admirable illustration of an historical tale. The existence of the face in the White Mountains of New Hampshire is well known. The nobility of the face, however, is something added by Hawthorne for its dramatic value to the story. There is also no such valley as that he describes which is within sight of the real

face. But if we assume a larger range, say a hundred miles, we include the great river valley of the Merrimac, which is filled with a population very similar to that we read of in his story. Such events as those he tells us never did happen, but without doubt Hawthorne found an actual legend about the face that a great man resembling it would come. It was then natural and easy to assume that various persons would claim the honor; and it is also both possible and probable that the great man would turn out to be some such humble person as Ernest. Hawthorne was so familiar with life that he enlarges the *actual facts* by the addition of *possible facts*, and in the resulting story we are unable to distinguish the real from the imaginary.

In all similar stories, the writer should start with as many actual facts as he can find; to these he adds such imaginary facts as he believes to be entirely possible. But when he has finished, the value of his story lies in the great principle of life which it illustrates. This is true just the same, even if the story is merely amusing. The story is amusing usually because the principle of life illustrated is an amusing one; but it interests us because we recognize it as true.

In order always to be true to life, even when using the imagination most freely, it is clear that we must know the life of which we write in a very thorough way. But human life is so wide that one man can know but one variety of it well. His natural bent of mind will determine what

variety. Maupassant's characters in his short stories (the best work he did, for his novels are not considered successful) are very simple folk; there are few details in their lives at best, and they did only one thing of importance, namely, the one thing he tells about. His stories are short because his characters are simple. The more complicated the character the more space it will take to elaborate it, that is, to name all the details it involves. Maupassant's characters, it may be observed, stayed in one place and had but few relations to the outside world. The characters that one can write about successfully are usually such as have mental habits like one's own, though outwardly they may be entirely different; for instance, if one's own plans and thoughts are on a large scale and far-reaching, one's characters will be of the same order, and the delineation of them will require an amount of space proportioned to their reach. And we see how needful it is for every writer above all things to master his own heart. There is only one person whom we have an unlimited opportunity to observe in all moods, in secret as well as in public, and even in his innermost thoughts and emotions, and that is, one's-self. We ought at least to know all there is to be known about him before we begin to write; and we may reflect that to know one man thoroughly is to know something of the whole human race.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CENTRAL IDEA.

Short stories are like pearls: at the very centre of a pearl is a grain of sand about which the pearl material gathered. At the very centre of every short story is some passing idea such as almost any one might pick up. It is hard and practical, and alone is not worth very much, though sometimes it is a grain of gold instead of a grain of sand. It is the first thing the writer thinks of, however. He says, "I have an idea for a story." About that idea he develops his pearl of a story.

As example is better than any discussion, we will give in this chapter what seem to us the first ideas on which certain well known stories were based; that is, what the author had in mind when he said to himself, "I have an idea for a story."

First let us refer to two stories in which the central idea is the matter of most importance. "The Last Sentence," by Maxwell Grey, though a novel in bulk, is really only a short story drawn out, and has all the characteristics of a first rate short story. The central idea is that of a judge condemning to death his own son. Such a situation may be developed in many ways. Either the judge may know that he is condemning his son, and do it in the performance of his duty; or he may be ignorant of that fact, and find out

only afterward what turns out to be the tragedy of his life. He may be in ignorance till the sentence is about to be pronounced, when the prisoner may inform him that he is condemning his own son. We may suppose that the judge goes on and pronounces the just sentence; or we may suppose that he breaks down and refuses to pronounce it. In whatever way we view the subject, it is full of intensely dramatic possibilities.

Another excellent story in which the central idea is of the first importance is "An Operation in Money." Albert Webster was impressed with the power a cashier in a bank has, and that the strain upon his honesty is something that justly ought to be paid for. So far the idea is commonplace enough; but when we think that all a cashier has to do is to put a bundle of bank-notes in his pocket when he goes home at night, and that no one will know it till the next morning, and then he could choose to serve the maximum ten years in prison and have the money to enjoy the rest of his life, the situation becomes startling. Here were facts that any one might know; but no one thought of making use of them till Albert Webster discovered their possibilities. With such a basis, all that is needed is skill in plot construction to develop the situation that may be assumed.

From these let us turn to some stories of the present day school, in which the central idea usually is slight. In Kipling's "Story of Muhammad

Din," we have the simplest account of an Indian baby who died. That is material that any one may have in any part of the world, and in itself is absolutely valueless. But in this story Kipling illustrates the fact that even the meanest child may have his dreams and ambitions in life. Hence the polo-ball, and the grand palaces the child traced in the dust. We find almost the same idea on a far grander scale in Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King," in which two beggars set out to be kings of Kafiristan. But these stories get their strength from the violent contrasts in which they abound—a subject we have already considered.

In Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" we have a story of conscience, based on the idea that a man may so brood over a crime that his mind will imagine everything is betraying him, even the beating of the dead man's heart, and this imaginary betrayal causes the man to betray himself. This story is a study of a psychological possibility, but it is just as real and true as if it were based on fact. The situation presented is the chief thing. Again in "The Gold-Bug" we have a story based on the supposition that the treasure known historically to have been hidden somewhere by Captain Kidd was found by means of a cipher. It requires a powerful creative imagination to work out these possible details so that they cannot be distinguished from historical fact, but evidently the central idea of the story was of essential importance.

In contrast with these tales of Poe's we may place Arthur Morrison's "On the Stairs." The central idea in this story is that everything that passes should occur on the stairs, a condition illustrative of the gossiping habits of the people in the East End of London. But that has no particular importance until we add to it the value which such people place on funeral ceremonies, even above life itself, and the thought that a life might actually be sacrificed through superstition and ignorance. When we comprehend that possibility, all the commonplace surroundings assume startling significance and interest. Here again we have a possibility made to appear like an actual fact. In the development of the story everything is taken from actual life except this single assumption.

The peculiarity of the ideas on which recent writers base their stories is their slightness in their original state as compared with the ample soul which the authors give them and the richness of the dress. Unless the writer has a wealth of material in his own mind and heart, such simple ideas as Kipling, Maupassant, and the others use become flat and absurd. To take a very slight notion and build up a good story on it is the most difficult phase of the art. It is far easier, and in its execution simpler, to take an incident ready-made, like that of the judge condemning his son. Almost any one who thought of the possible power a bank cashier would have if he simply carried a parcel of bank-notes away with

him at night, and was willing coolly to face the consequences, could make a story out of it which would at least be readable, provided he did not plaster it with sentiment or bad writing. And it is with stories like these that one ought to begin. But the higher artistic qualities of the slighter plot united with the greater significance should be the goal toward which every writer ought ultimately to aim, if only for the influence upon his simpler work in giving it depth.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOUL OF THE STORY.

In the preceding chapter we have compared a perfect story to a pearl, in which the pearl material gathers about a grain of sand, the central idea of the story. We have seen, also, that the grain of sand, or the central idea, is useless until the moral or principle of life is added to it. We saw how the very slight material of an Indian child playing in the garden and then dying became the basis for a masterly short story when the idea of the child's ambitions in life was added to it. In "The Necklace" the incident illustrates the general principles of the irony of fate. And so if we examine each one of the stories analysed, we shall find that there was a principle of life, a moral, or a *realization* of a general idea or situation or character which was the real reason for the existence of the story.

The second sort of story in our five different

kinds was the Fable, which is a story told expressly to illustrate a moral. In the fables of Aesop the story is told so briefly that there is nothing of value in it except the moral. In the stories of Hawthorne we shall find that each story has a very definite moral purpose; and while the stories are fully developed, the matter of chief importance is the principle illustrated.

Though ordinary dramatic stories do not have a moral which shows itself, still under the surface in every story, however slight and however seemingly frivolous, there is something which corresponds to the moral, and which we shall call *the soul of the story*. The soul in any story is that element which makes the story significant for life, which gives it a bearing on the problems of our existence, and which makes it a creation with a power of playing its own individual part in the world, like a human being. Humorous stories illustrate absurd or ridiculous phases of life, or excite our amusement by their slight exaggeration; but they would not interest us if they did not mean something. Other stories may illustrate purely intellectual phases of character, and have no real *moral*. In any case the moral must not be a lesson, and must not be stated in plain words: rather it is something that each reader must deduce for himself from the story as it is told. He feels it rather than reads it. But it is the divine, the immortal element.

Certainly a story is very likely to live or die in proportion to the size of its soul; that is, in

proportion as it is in some way significant of life. It is the soul of the story which makes it sink into the reader's mind and live there, and which makes him go back to a story and read it a second or a third time. He has caught a breath of the infinite, or a glimpse of the meaning of existence which he did not have so clearly before and it gives him life.

If we should go over the great stories of standard writers we should find that every one, without a single exception, has a meaning of its own in regard to life. In Poe's story of "The Gold-Bug," for instance, there is no moral lesson, but there is a most striking intellectual lesson in the way in which Legrand made out the meaning of the cipher and by its aid actually found the treasure. Maupassant's "A Piece of String" contains a curious incident. It is odd that so simple a thing as a piece of string should get a man into such trouble, such dire trouble. But that is not all. How did it get him into trouble? That is of much more vital concern. We see how clearly the author has brought out the thought that the incident of the string was only the excuse of fate for showing the man's real character. He resented the implication against him, just because he knew of his weakness in that direction, and realized that he might have been guilty, though as a matter of fact he was not; and this made him determined to clear himself. He was really condemned to death by his own consciousness of evil, though he tried to believe he was the victim

of an unjust persecution; and such a principle as that has vast significance for us who live lives in the world.

The young writer may ask, How is this to be managed? What is the rule for manufacturing the soul of a story, and putting it within the heart of the incident? Alas, there is no rule, for just here we touch on the vast unknown which separates those who have stories to tell from those who have not, or who are not endowed with this sort of genius. But the soul of the story is born of much thinking about life and its principles, its inner meaning, its significance, whether intellectual, moral, or sentient.

If one does not know something worth knowing about life, something of value or suggestiveness, something new and meaningful, he has no material out of which to create a soul. In order to create soul one must have the soul material within him to begin with.

But if one is deeply and vitally interested in life, he will not care to attempt a story which does not have some meaning. His clever incident, his power of character-drawing, his beautiful style, will all be held subservient to the soul, the significance; and they will all be used to clothe and express the soul, which is a conviction, a feeling, an inward realization, and not a theory or creed or bit of clever information about life. The soul is drawn out of the deep wells of our being, and in the written story it is the element that gives lasting fame.

CHAPTER VI.

CHARACTER STUDY.

The third kind of short story is the Study, which may be a study of almost anything, but we may consider it the study of character. This is then the third element to be considered in the construction of a perfect story. The tale and the fable tell about people and what they do, but a great many different kinds of people might do the things that are described. Indeed, if the characters were wooden sticks they might go through all the motions just the same as if they were highly individualized human beings. But the finer the point of the story, the more it has a soul rather than an obtrusive moral, the more individual must be the study of character. The truth is, it is difficult to imagine a story absolutely without character study in any form, but many stories have a merely conventional character study. In a story having a really original character study, the relation of the character to the soul of the story is usually vital, that is, there could be no soul if there were not a living character to which the soul of the story could be attached in some way, though the soul of the story is a very different thing from the soul of the chief character.

Character study may appear in a story in many ways. It may be through the external peculiarities of the persons involved, as in Barrie's mas-

terpiece "How Gavin Birse Put it to Mag Low-nie," where Barrie has sketched a group of peasant faces as clear and characteristic as the portrait-artist's pencil ever drew. Their eccentricities and peculiarities are highly amusing, and not the least so because we recognize them as drawn straight from life.

Again in Kipling's "Muhammad Din" we find a real individual character. He is not merely an Indian baby: he is Muhammad Din—the emphasis on the name makes this clearly apparent. He differs from all other babies in certain characteristics that can hardly be analysed; but this difference helps to make the story different in its interest from all other stories. We come to like, even to love the characters in fiction, and if the characters are such that they would attract us in real life, when we find them in a story we are likely to make them our chief friends.

In Maupassant's stories more clearly than in any others (but the same holds true of all good stories), each tale gives a complete idea of some one character. Each one of his stories is the history of a life drama. The catastrophe turns the life course about so sharply that there can be no doubt whatever in regard to it. Observe how absolutely Madam Loisel's life was changed by the loss of the necklace after the ball, and how, just when she thought she was about to rise, she fell deeper than she had ever been. Again, in "A Piece of String" the simple incident of the picking up of a piece of string results in driving the old man to misery and finally to death.

Maupassant in each case tells the great and vital event in each life, and lets all other details go. So long as life runs in its natural channels it is not interesting. You cannot know how much power is concealed in it. Nobody knows with what force a cannon-ball is moving until it meets some obstacle. Then there is a crash, and the violence of the crash measures the force of the cannon ball. Nobody knows how much latent power is contained in a human life until that life runs up against an obstacle, and its course is completely changed or all its force destroyed. The life may be surprisingly weak or surprisingly strong. In either case it becomes a striking example, and the crash gives us a chance to study its moving principles. When the crash comes the whole life is laid open and we see its secret springs. That is what interests us in our general study of human nature.

Every perfect story which describes a human drama must have one central character, to which all others are subordinate. There are stories of a family, or of a city, or of a nation, in which the family or city or nation is treated as an individual human being, and to all intents and purposes is a unit. But we may think of the central figure in every story as being a single person, as is usually the case. It is never a group of persons not welded together into a body in some way, and when a group is so welded together, you take the group for the purposes of the story as a body and not as a cluster of individuals.

This statement that there can be but one character in a story may need illustration, for it is not patent at the outset. For instance, in a love story there are two lovers. How is the love story more the story of one lover than the other? the reader may ask. The reply is that in every such case one such personality is much more interesting than the other in the mind of the author, and he always selects this one personality as the centre about which the story is woven. The catastrophe turns the life current of this particular one aside, while the life current of the other goes on undisturbed.

In "The Necklace" there are two characters, the husband and the wife. But the story is all about the wife, for the incident happened to her. There may also be a story about the husband, how he felt, how his life was turned about; but Maupassant found the story of the woman so much more interesting that he told that rather than the story of the man. It would have been a serious artistic mistake to try to tell both in the same short story. In "Patient Griselda" we have Griselda, and also the marquis; but while the life of Griselda is powerfully affected, and is turned, first to great heights of happiness, then to sorrow, and finally to permanent honor and respect, it is clear that the life of the marquis goes on in almost exactly the same channels that it always did. The story is the story of Griselda and not of the marquis, except as he is a force influencing Griselda. In the story of the Barmecide's

feast in the "Arabian Nights," otherwise called the story of the barber's sixth brother Shacabac, the incident of the feast is the matter of chief interest, but it would count for little if it were not for the character of Shacabac. How few men would have done as he did! and in any other case the story would be a farce. As it is, it results in the permanent elevation of this beggar to a position of honor and trust.

Dickens's story "A Child's Dream of a Star" is clearly the story of the boy, for it is his life that is influenced by the star, and his life alone that holds our attention to the incidents. Were it not for Ernest we should care little for Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face." To be sure, we have Ernest's mother, and Gathergold, and old Blood-and-Thunder, and the Poet; but they are brought in only for their effect on Ernest, and to show his relations to the world. His life alone was really affected by the great stone face.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SETTING OF A SHORT STORY.

Before beginning to write a story, that is, before putting pen to paper, you must get your incident, your "soul" or moral, and your central character. All these things must be clearly in the mind. The original rough diamond must be cut and polished perfectly preparatory to setting in words. In actual practice one frequently works the story out by writing it, and no method is

better or even nearly so good. But the first draft must be completely thrown aside or recast if the story is to be perfectly set. After much practice a writer will be able to perfect a story in his mind so that the first draft will be sufficiently good. But the young writer will do best to sit down with pen in hand and write anything about the subject that comes into his mind. He should not trouble about setting, but plunge at once into describing with as much simplicity and directness as possible the events he wishes to narrate. Gradually the best form for the story will develop itself, and the story can be given an artistic setting. It is a great mistake to think of the setting first, however. The idea and all the details and events must be developed in the mind if not on paper before a really artistic setting can be given.

But when a story has been perfectly conceived and is all ready to be put into artistic form, the practical suggestions of this chapter may be applied.

The background of a story should always be the last thing to be chosen, but it is the first thing to consider when one comes to actual writing out. A story is much like a painting. Some pictures admit no especial background, as for instance a picture of an interior. Other pictures, portraits for example, demand an artificial background, and this artificial background is so chosen as best to contrast with and bring out the figure. In story-writing it appears to be simple portraits

that need least background, for a story is a picture of the interior of a mind, while a painting gives the exterior of the expression.

One of the best examples of artificial setting is found in Maupassant's story entitled in the English translation "Happiness."* The story was told in its first crude form in a diary of Maupassant's entitled "Afloat." Here is the material for the story as we find it there:

THE OLD COUPLE.

Last year the friend who first revealed to me this strangely quaint country, showed me two creatures infinitely more curious.

This is how he first discovered them. Wandering on horseback among these valleys he suddenly came across a prosperous farm: vines, fields, and a farmhouse which looked comfortable though humble.

He entered. He was received by a woman, a peasant, about seventy years old. The husband, seated under a tree, rose and came forward to bow.

"He is deaf," she said.

He was a fine old fellow of eighty, amazingly strong, upright and handsome. They had for servants a laborer and a farm-girl. My friend, a little surprised to meet these singular persons in the midst of a desert, enquired about them. They had been there a long time; they were much respected, and passed for being comfortably off, that is, for peasants.

He came back several times to visit them, and little by little became the confidant of the wife. He brought her papers and books, being surprised to

*For the complete story, see "The Odd Number," Harper & Bros.

find that she had some ideas, or rather remains of ideas, which scarcely seemed those of her class. She was, however, neither well read, intelligent, nor witty, but there seemed to be in the depths of her memory traces of forgotten thoughts, a slumbering recollection of a by-gone education. One day she asked him his name:

"I am the Count de X——," he said.

Moved by the obscure vanity which is lodged deep in all souls, she replied,—

"I, too, am noble."

Then she went on, speaking for certainly the first time in her life of this piece of ancient history, unknown to any one.

"I am the daughter of a colonel. My husband was a non-commissioned officer in my father's regiment. I fell in love with him and we ran away together."

"And you came here?"

"Yes, we hid ourselves."

"And you have never seen your family since?"

"Oh, no! Don't you see, my husband was a deserter."

"You have never written to any one?"

"Oh, no!"

"And you have never heard any one speak of your family, of your father or mother?"

"Oh, no! Mamma was dead."

This woman had preserved a certain childishness, the simplicity of those who throw themselves into love, as if over a precipice.

He asked again:

"You have never told this to any one?"

She answered, "Oh, no! I can say it now, because Maurice is deaf. As long as he could hear I should not have dared to mention it. Besides, I have never seen any one but the peasants since I ran away."

"At least, then, you have been happy."

"Oh, yes, very happy. I have been very happy. I have never regretted anything."

Well, I also had gone last year to visit this woman, this couple, as one goes to gaze at some miraculous relic.

I had contemplated with surprise, sadness, and even a little disgust, this woman who had followed this man, this rustic Adonis, attracted by his hussar uniform, and who had continued to see him, under his peasant rags, with the blue dolman slung over his back, sword at his side, and the high boot with clanking spur.

She had, however, become a peasant herself. In the depths of this wilderness she had become perfectly accustomed to this life without luxuries, without charm, or delicacy of any sort, she had adapted herself to these simple manners. And she loved him still. She had become one of the people, in cap and coarse petticoat. Seated on a straw-bottomed chair at a wooden table she ate a mess of cabbage, potatoes and bacon from an earthenware plate. She slept on a straw mattress beside him.

She had never thought of anything but him! She had regretted neither ornaments, silks, nor elegance, nor soft chairs, nor the perfumed warmth of well-curtained rooms, nor repose in a comfortable bed. She had never needed anything but him! As long as he was there, she had wanted nothing else!

She was quite young when she abandoned life, the world, and those who had brought her up and loved her. Alone with him she had come to this savage ravine. And he had been everything to her, everything that could be longed for, dreamt of, expected, ceaselessly hoped for. He had filled her life with happiness

from one end to another. She could not have been happier.

A story like this is not a study of a single character, a portrait, but a presentation of a little scene, showing the couple in Corsica happy because of love alone, and a background is absolutely necessary. Maupassant opens with a description of a scene which is a perfect contrast to the scene in the story. The story is dark, therefore he chooses a light, bright scene—a villa and fashionable people, surrounded with everything the world affords. He immediately touches on the common link, the common note of color if it were a painting: he mentions *love*, which is of interest to rich and poor alike. In this case his setting describes people like those of his audience, the people who will read the story; and his mention of love at the very start indicates clearly in just what direction the interest of the tale will lie. Next the scene of his story is introduced with the utmost skill and grace: Corsica looming above the sea in the distance; and this strange apparition suggests the story, which is then told in the simplest possible narrative form, the events being described in the order in which they happened to the teller.

Here is his introduction as he wrote it:

HAPPINESS.

It was tea-time before the appearance of the lamps. The villa commanded the sea: the sun, which had disappeared, had left the sky all rosy from his passing—

rubbed, as it were, with gold-dust; and the Mediterranean, without a ripple, without a shudder, smooth, still shining under the dying day, seemed like a huge polished metal plate.

Far off to the right the jagged mountains outlined their black profile on the paled purple of the west.

We talked of love, we discussed that old subject, we said again the things which we had said already very often. The sweet melancholy of the twilight made our words slower, caused a tenderness to waver in our souls; and that word, "love," which came back ceaselessly, now pronounced by a strong man's voice, now uttered by the frail-toned voice of a woman, seemed to fill the little salon, to flutter there like a bird, to hover there like a spirit.

Can one remain in love for several years in succession?

"Yes," maintained some.

"No," affirmed others.

We distinguished cases, we established limitations, we cited examples; and all, men and women, filled with rising and troubled memories, which they could not quote, and which mounted to their lips, seemed moved, and talked of that common, that sovereign thing, the tender and mysterious union of two beings, with a profound emotion and an ardent interest.

But all of a sudden some one, whose eyes had been fixed upon the distance, cried out:

"Oh! look down there; what is it?"

On the sea at the bottom of the horizon, loomed up a mass, gray, enormous and confused.

The women had risen from their seats, and without understanding, looked at this surprising thing which they had never seen before.

Some one said:

"It is Corsica! You see it so two or three times a year, in certain exceptional conditions of the atmosphere, when the air is perfectly clear, and it is not concealed by those mists of sea-fog which always veil the distances."

We distinguished vaguely the mountain ridges, we thought we recognized the snow on their summits. And every one remained surprised, troubled, almost terrified by this sudden apparition of a world, by this phantom risen from the sea. It may be that those who, like Columbus, went away across undiscovered oceans had such strange visions as this.

Then said an old gentleman who had not yet spoken:

"See here: I knew in that island which raised itself before us, as if in person to answer what we said, and to recall to me a singular memory—I knew, I say, an admirable case of love which was true, of love which, improbably enough, was happy.

"Here it is—

At the end of his story the author comes back to his beginning. He started with love, he ends with love. The general rule is to start out with a statement of the idea which impresses you most, and end with this idea.

We have said a story is like a painting. When one first conceives a story, events and incidents are the chief thing in the mind; but when the story is written, the description looms up and fills the eye almost completely. A mere narrative without description (that is, setting) is like an outline charcoal head. The finished portrait presents the living subject to the mind. It is alive

in color, action, and personality. Description is word painting. If one understands the art of painting with pigments, he ought easily to understand the art of painting with words.* When one paints a picture of a woman's face, for instance, he does not begin with details, he catches the pose, the action, the outline. The modelling of the face must be seen and done first in masses of light and shade. No sooner are these laid in than degrees of light and shade develop. The details work out in their true relations of importance. By beginning with the largest, the heaviest, the most important, simplicity and effectiveness are secured. In "The Necklace" observe how Maupassant paints a woman's character in words. He begins with the most striking fact of observation, the element which would strike you first if you saw the actual woman: "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks." He fixes her station in life, and this usually determines a multitude of facts. The remainder of the first paragraph is devoted to an elaboration of the idea. The next paragraph begins, "She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was as unhappy as though she had really fallen from her proper station." This sentence strikes the keynote of the story. The student will notice that the first paragraph determines the general

*The best examples of descriptive word-painting are to be found in Ruskin, especially in his "Modern Painters" and "Stones of Venice."

character of the situation, the second strikes the keynote.

A story is like a scene of a play in a theatre, but the writer must put in the scenery as well as the actors, always remembering that a story is the description of the interior of a heart, not so much the exterior, and in this it differs from the painted scenery of a theatre. But before one makes his actors act in a story, he must give a vivid impression of the place, surroundings, dress, and general manner of his characters, whether from the interior point of view or the exterior—it may be either as occasion demands. But a story is sure to be a failure without this picture in some form or other. Sometimes it is woven in with the narrative, sometimes placed at or near the beginning. But it must be somewhere. The young writer finds it naturally existing in his own imagination and fancies it must exist also in the mind of the reader. But this is seldom the case. One should take account of the stock of material he has on hand, and put down something in the written story to correspond to every detail of the picture in his own mind. A well known author once said to the writer that an unwritten story was like a quart of molasses in a measure, which when turned out stuck to the sides and so yielded but a pint. The young writer imagines a good story, but when he has written it out the story is not more than half so good as he fancied, and he wonders what is the matter. The truth is, half of it remains still in

the mind: he has not put on paper all that he thought, or felt, or imagined, which went to make up the story as he conceived it.

The opposite fault of putting into a story description which is unnecessary is almost as fatal. This unnecessary description comes from the author's fancying that there ought to be description of some kind, and not knowing what description to choose he describes anything and everything that comes into his mind. What is really needed is description nicely calculated to produce a given effect, as with the scenery or costume of a theatre. Some scenery and some costumes are used simply because there must be scenery and there must be costume; but an effective play has scenery and costume which directly aid in the development of the motive. The case is much the same with short story writing: the best description is that which is chosen with direct reference to the motive of the tale.

But how shall one choose? That is the hard question, of course, and can only be answered by experiment. Would you know what will prove effective? First, observe what has proved effective in the best models, and then try a story of your own. When it is finished read it to a friend. If you keep your wits about you sufficiently you can easily tell from his expression of face or your own consciousness whether a passage is good or bad, effective or weak. If it is weak, all you can do is to throw it out bodily and write another. But the young writer must remember that the

test of a story is its power to hold the interest of some particular real person.

EXERCISES IN SHORT STORY WRITING.

The best method of studying the short story is to reconstruct a series of masterpieces, for example such as are contained in "The World's Greatest Short Stories." I. Condense the stories of "Aladdin" and also "Patient Griselda" to 1,500 words each by selecting sentences and paragraphs from the original: only the most effective incidents should be used, and the fewest possible of those. II. Adapt three or four pages of "A Passion in the Desert" to a Rocky Mountain scene—forest instead of desert. III. Adapt the description of Rip Van Winkle at home to a descendant of his supposed to be living now in your own town. IV. Rewrite Dickens's story "A Child's Dream of a Star," making the chief character a little girl. V. Condense Poe's "Gold-Bug" to 1,500 words, changing the wording as little as possible and omitting the study of the cipher, and then adapt it to finding treasure near your own town. VI. Condense Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face" to 1,500 words and then adapt it to the figure of a pine tree on the top of a distant hill, which assumes a likeness to the profile of George Washington. VII. After adapting the remainder of the stories in the volume in a similar way, try to find outside fresh material for stories as nearly like any one of these as possible, and work up that material with the masterpiece before you as a model.

PART III

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CREATIVE COMPOSITION

Introductory.

As this work is intended for the ordinary person, who makes no pretense at genius, it may seem unnecessary to discuss "creative" writing. Many may doubt the feasibility of teaching creative composition at all, since it is indisputably so much a matter of genius; and it will be regarded by the common reader as quite beyond his modest ambition.

The fact is, however, that genius and common human nature are not essentially different. The genius has a little more of one quality and a little less of some other, but only so far as his mind works in the same way as the mind of the reader does the reader account him a genius. We are all, or ought all to be readers, and the reader has been described as re-creating the work of the great author, sympathetically following in his footsteps. The genius indeed leads the way; but the reader who follows and reproduces in his own mind is indispensable to the existence of literature. The fact is, readers taken as a body do more to determine the character of a literature than all the geniuses put together.

Therefore we ought to study the principles of crea-

tive art so that we may become good readers. Ordinarily the reader re-creates by instinct, paying little attention to rules and principles of construction. But analysis compels thought, forces the acquirement of greater skill, and by its reaction on the mind greatly increases its powers.

We ought to study creative writing, moreover, because, though humble, we too are constantly called upon to write—letters, if nothing else; and by the study of that which is above us we may catch some sparks of the divine which will illumine and elevate the humble compositions which we produce. The great and the small are not at all different in substance, only in size; and it should be our pride to make our little as perfect as the greatest genius makes his much.

Again, some of us may wish to write for the press. Perhaps we have talent; more probably we have not. If we have not, this study will help us to find it out. Knowledge of our lack of ability is just as important as knowledge of our ability—indeed it is more so, for it will save fruitless expenditure of time and energy, and enable us to do something that will be really worth doing.

If we have talent, and are determined to cultivate it, then above all is it important that we should undergo a severe course of training and instruction. Maupassant, the most perfectly artistic writer of short stories we know, studied seven years with Flaubert before he began to print at all, with the result of a very obvious skill. The best short story writers in London today are the young men Mr. W. E. Henley discovered and trained when he was editor of the *National Observer*. Miss Wilkins will probably not deny that for several years she submitted to rigorous

criticism by Mr. Alden, the editor of *Harper's Magazine*. And many of the greatest writers, if they have not had personal instructors, have been obliged to put themselves through a long and arduous system of training. Balzac was never a natural writer. When he submitted his first play for the criticism of his father's friends, a competent critic told him he should adopt any profession but literature. But he persisted, setting himself to the work of self-training. He wrote over forty volumes of fiction during the next ten years, and not until he was twenty-eight did he feel willing to publish a book over his own name. To go back to Greek history, we are told that Demosthenes was born with none of the usual natural gifts, and never had them. When he tried to be humorous, he raised the laugh only against himself. He had no lightness of style, no power of characterization; and, besides, he was a stutterer. He learned to speak plainly by putting pebbles in his mouth, and submitted himself to almost torturous exercises. He is said to have copied the speeches out of the writings of Thucydides not less than ten times, in order to gain a command of language. Says Longinus: "Demosthenes has no touches of character, none of the versatility, fluency, or declamatory skill of Hyperides. He is, in fact, almost destitute of all those excellencies which I have just enumerated. But by the noble qualities which he does possess he remains supreme above all rivals, and throws a cloud over his failings, silencing by his thunders and blinding by his lightnings the orators of all ages."

When the Greeks wanted to become writers they invariably went to personal masters. There were those who said in those days, Genius is the thing! the art of writing cannot be taught. In opening his textbook

"On the Sublime," Longinus says: "Some hold generally that there is mere delusion in attempting to reduce such subjects to technical rules. 'The Sublime,' they tell us, 'is born in a man, and not to be secured by instruction; genius is the only master who can teach it. The vigorous products of nature' (such is their view) 'are weakened and in every respect debased when robbed of their flesh and blood by frigid technicalities'." But Longinus conclusively answers the objection. "In her most passionate moods," says he, "Nature, while detesting all appearance of restraint, does not show herself utterly wayward and reckless. The vital spark always comes from nature, yet to determine the right degree and the right moment, and to contribute the precision of practice and experience is the peculiar province of scientific method. The great passions, left to their own blind and rash impulses without the control of reason, are in the same danger as a ship let drive at random without ballast. Genius is undoubtedly the greatest blessing we can have, in writing as well as in every other walk of life; but almost equal in importance is it to be well advised, to be a conscious master of art. And above all, a writer can learn only from art when he is to abandon himself to the direction of his genius."

One of the most practical arguments for training over mere natural talent is the fact that the educated genius has been able to repeat his successes *ad libitum*, while mere natural gifts have often failed after the first effort. Mrs. Stowe wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin" as it were by accident, and it was perhaps the most popular single book of the century; but her other stories, some of them equally ambitious, are wholly unknown, and never had any vogue. On the other hand, Maupassant, after his seven years' training,

wrote one short story that made his fame immediately, and from that time for twelve years he was able to turn out two volumes a year, each succeeding volume even more successful than its predecessors. Balzac, after failing for twelve years—or rather training for twelve years—produced ninety works in the next twenty years.

When his first work on the art of story-writing was published some years ago, the author of this book was accused of wishing to “set up a factory for creating novelists.” Nothing was farther from his thought, and the more thoughtful critics discovered that if all the directions given should be followed out strictly, the enormous work involved would be enough to make a good writer out of almost any one.

The fact is, if the untrained and half-trained writers whose works now burden the printing presses of the country in so frightful a way, could be forced by law or custom to submit to such a rigorous training as the law requires of doctors and lawyers, no spark of genius would be snuffed out, real genius would shine all the brighter, and the mental and moral health of the people would be improved one thousand per cent.

The principles of creative composition are not easily discovered, and any effort to teach them must be imperfect in the extreme. The chapters that follow profess to be nothing more than fragmentary remarks, which it is hoped the readers of this book may find useful.

Since fiction is the form of creative art which interests nine tenths of our literary students, the suggestions here offered have been applied more specifically to story-writing; but the writer of any other form of prose composition will easily be able to adapt all gen-

eral principles to the particular form of composition in which he is personally interested.

The author has ventured in one or two chapters to offer some simple advice based on common sense and experience—advice directed specifically to the young and ambitious author who wishes to get into print; but it is believed that the remarks will be found to be of more or less universal application, and will prove suggestive even to mere readers and students who have no ambition to appear in type. It will be perceived that the general drift of the remarks is to the effect that it is best to keep out of print as long as possible.

CHAPTER I.

VERSE-WRITING.

Verse-writing seems to be the first literary form that savage peoples perfect, and an eminent critic has even maintained that only barbarians can write good poetry (allowance must be made for the "rhetoric" of this statement). Likewise the best poetry is commonly written in youth when the blood is warm and the emotions intense. Many great writers, even prose writers, have begun with verse, and it affords a most excellent literary training. In fact prose cannot be written with entire success till the mind reaches a certain maturity. Nearly all the accomplished prose writers, such as Thackeray, Addison, Bacon, Lamb, attained their marked success only when past middle life. On the other hand poets like Shelley, Byron, and Keats died at an age before

that at which the prose writers had accomplished anything at all. Such writers as Dickens, who published "Pickwick" at twenty-four, and Ruskin who published the first volume of "Modern Painters" at the same age, wrote prose of an extremely lyrical type, that was closely akin to poetry.

So probably the best thing a young writer can do is to try to be a poet; for even if he doesn't succeed it will prepare him to be a prose writer later in life. Overcoming the mechanical difficulties of verse affords a thorough literary training in itself.

The mechanics of verse are really much more simple than books on prosody would seem to indicate. Verse is exactly the same, as far as meter is concerned, as music (that is the time element in music). A foot, consisting of one to six syllables, is practically the same as a bar in music: exactly the same amount of time must be given to every foot, just as exactly the same amount of time must be given to each bar in a piece of music. One syllable in each foot is accented, that is, it is longer than the rest; and so in a bar of music one note is usually longer than the rest and receives therefore a sort of accent.

In English verse there are practically only four kinds of simple feet, namely:

Iambic, the foot consisting of one short or un-

accented syllable followed by one long or accented, as in

The splen'|dor falls'|on cas'|tle walls'.

Trochaic, the foot consisting of one long or accented syllable followed by one short, as in

Once' up|on' a|mid'night|drea'ry,|as' I|pon'dered
weak' and|wea'ry.

Dactylic, the foot consisting of one long or accented syllable followed by two short or unaccented, as in

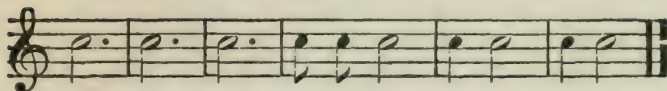
This' is the|for'est pri|me'val; but|where' are the
hearts' that be|neath' it

Leaped' like the|roe', when he|hears' in the
wood'land the|voice' of the|hunts'man?

Anapestic, the foot consisting of two short or unaccented syllables followed by one long or accented, as in

At the close'|of the day'|when the ham'|let is
still'.

Practically there are many variations and substitutions in verse as it is written, for the actual number of syllables in any foot depends on the time required to utter them, and the time required as pauses for punctuation marks or the ends of lines may take the place of entire syllables. All these variations may be represented by the time notation of music, as in the following line from Tennyson, which may be represented according to the way we read it either as



Break, break, break, On thy cold grey stones, O sea!

OR



Break, break, break, On thy cold grey stones, O sea!

Poetry is also divided into lines, two feet making a *dimeter* line, three feet a *trimeter*, four feet a *tetrameter*, five feet a *pentameter*, six feet a *hexameter*. *Blank verse* is iambic pentameter.

A mastery of the mechanics of verse requires a long and thorough training of the ear in the elements of time and melody.

The Literary Side of Verse. The choice and arrangement of words in poetry is a subject that cannot be analysed successfully. Attention to rules is worse than useless. The essential element is intensity and sincerity of emotion. No good verse can be written without both these; and these, united with literary energy in the study of the masters of poetry, will make a successful poet if anything will. One of the best books for a student of poetry to possess and study is Palgrave's "Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics." The simplest poets to study for unpretentious melody are Longfellow and Burns; for variety and mastery of technic, Tennyson and

Milton (earlier lyric poems); for perfection of style, Keats; for airy imagination, Shelley; for narrative poetry, Byron and Mrs. Browning. Such poets as Robert Browning and Wordsworth are to be studied more for their thought than for their form, since the form is often more or less complicated and imperfect according as the thought is high and inspiring.

CHAPTER II.

ESSAY-WRITING.

Under the head of "essay-writing" we may consider miscellaneous magazine and newspaper writing which has a distinctive literary flavor. Compilations, scientific treatises, etc., usually lack what we may term "the creative element." Their construction is mechanical in a large degree, and while they are useful, they cannot be called "literary."

If a newspaper or magazine writer has a fair command of language, his work will pass criticism provided he has anything really valuable or interesting to say. The subject-matter alone is considered, and the style must merely be free from errors and objectionable characteristics. Of such writers are composed the "mob of gentlemen who write with ease."

But the literary artist is not content to be mere-

ly one of the "mob." He wishes to give his writing "distinction:" how shall he do it?

The essay is as nearly devoid of "construction" as any form of writing can be. Any arrangement of the subject-matter is permissible which is logical and suited to the intelligence of the reader. All the suggestions in the following pages for the study of the reader and his needs apply as much to the essay as to the story or drama, but the essay need not confine itself to one subject, nor proceed according to any definite logical scheme such as the orator must use in debate. Nothing could be more discursive than some of the greatest essays, such as those of De Quincey.

The one quality which enables an essay-writer to make his work distinctive is technical "style"—artistic texture—use of language. While a story-writer may attain success by a clever plot, or by clever character study, and does not need to make so prolonged a study of the great masters of style, the general (or essay) writer must master style if he is really to be successful at all. For this there is no better way than Franklin's method of imitating the great writers and masters of language. Moreover, study and practice must be prolonged for a considerable time, and should be accompanied with extensive reading of standard literature.

The greatest fault of the general writer is dullness. While at times he is interesting because his subject is interesting, and at other times his enthusiasm makes him eloquent, still he will often

have to write about things that are not very interesting, and there will be times when his enthusiasm is low. At such times he will inevitably fall into the commonplace, or his style will become turgid through the effort that he makes to avoid dullness. How can a writer always be readable?

Perhaps the writer of our own time who always succeeds in being interesting, whatever his subject and whatever his moods, is Mr. Andrew Lang. And the secret of his success appears to be that he has mastered "the art of humor." It may be a surprise to some to learn that humor is an art; but in the case of the general writer it certainly is. It can be cultivated, mastered, and practised; and since it is a compound, we must seek it in its elements one at a time. In addition to a natural sense of the absurd or incongruous, the kind of humor we have in mind finds its roots in a broad human sympathy, an intelligent understanding of the average man, and a willingness to adapt one's-self to the whims and humors of that average man. It is cheerful, and tries to be lively; it never gets angry or gloomy; it does not even maintain its serious moods too long at a time, nor does it have too high a regard for consistency.

Always to be all these things undoubtedly requires a great and constant effort. Artistic writing never can be a pastime in itself, even though it is devoted to affording amusement to others. Indeed, creative writing of any kind is one of the

most exhausting labors man can undertake. Even a brilliant genius, with all his brilliancy, accomplishes nothing unless he labors. But to be light and genial while laboring with such intensity is indeed a great accomplishment.

Next in value to the style pervaded by humor, is the terse and epigrammatic style. The French writer depends on the terse and epigrammatic in the same habitual way that the English writer depends on humor. As the younger American and English writers have felt strongly of late the influence of the great French masters of style, such as Flaubert, Daudet, Gautier, and Maupassant, this style is coming to be far commoner in English writing in modern times than it was in our older literature. This is the only style that enables a writer to be entirely effective in a very short space. The style of humor is naturally expansive, and in very short compositions it often fails of its effect. This no doubt explains the diffuseness of much of the best writing of the first half of the nineteenth century. This is a fault that modern practice is happily correcting.

The chief fault of the condensed, epigrammatic style is that if prolonged it quickly wears. Some short novels have been written in this style, but their vogue did not last long. In Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" we see the epigrammatic style happily combined with the sympathetic and diffusive. Probably in no other way than by such a combination could so long a novel have been made so popular. But la-

ter writers have combined the two elements of the terse and the humorous in compositions of magazine length, and with the best results.

Too often the general writer in seeking to get out of his commonplace style, cultivates mannerisms, which perhaps for the moment will attract public attention, but which in the end may be fatal to literary accomplishment and success. These mannerisms are usually acquired by imitating some one writer until the peculiarity is caught. Then if the writer finds that a certain method brings him notoriety, he proceeds to exaggerate it, developing it to the exclusion of everything else. Perhaps he deceives himself into thinking that he has acquired a "distinctive style." The fact is, the writer who has only one style is pretty sure to end by having a bad one. If, however, he learns one style, and then another (it is necessary to learn one at a time), the second is pretty certain to correct the faults of the first, and the danger we have spoken of is avoided. The ideal is to have a mastery of many styles, choosing for each subject the style best suited to it.

These remarks apply especially to descriptive magazine writing, critical magazine writing, newspaper editorial writing, and newspaper book reviewing. As commonly done in newspapers and magazines today, all these kinds of writing are unnecessarily dull. The writer's qualification for his work is his special knowledge of his subject, or his general good judgment. Of course both

knowledge and good judgment must come before style; but for the highest success, style must be added. There are, however, various ways in which each of these kinds of writing may be made more interesting.

The best way to make book reviews readable is to quote in them good things from the book reviewed. The art of quotation is by no means an easy one, for the interest of a review depends altogether on how the quotations are made. Above all, the passages quoted must not be "specimens" or detached fragments. The review should read like a story, and the quotations should form an essential part of a continuous train of thought. The most successful modern practitioner of the art of quotation has been T. P. O'Connor, whose page reviews in the London "Weekly Sun" were at one time a striking feature. He simply used the skill of the writer of the book to furnish him with brilliant passages which he made part and portion of his own account of the book itself. This was something his imitators have never succeeded in doing.

In newspaper editorials and magazine critical articles, the anecdote is one of the best means of enlivenment. It is in effect a very short story, and to tell an anecdote well requires some knowledge of short story writing. The writer of such articles will be well repaid for making a distinct and painstaking study of story-writing for this special purpose. Moreover, the introduction of a few words of dialogue is always a pleasant relief

to the reader. An editorial writer who can master the terse style (the most important for his purposes), the humorous style, and the anecdote, will surely attain a distinction that will raise him above the "mob."

The descriptive magazine article is one of the most difficult to make really interesting. Its value usually depends on its pictorial illustrations. The best means of lifting it out of the slough of the commonplace is to infuse into it something of the sentiment of places and personalities; in other words to reproduce the atmosphere of the thing described, or if it has no atmosphere that you know of to create one for it. We see this done to perfection for common places and common things in Ike Marvel's "Dream Life." But often the subject is real and has an atmosphere of its own; and the first effort of the writer should be to discover it sympathetically as a part of the material to be used.

Necessarily what has here been suggested has been no more than hinted at. Each student for himself should pick out the suggestion that especially applies to his case, and carry it into effect by systematic study and effort. The amount of work that an artist must do is unlimited.

CHAPTER III.

NOVEL-WRITING.

The essential difference between the novel and the short story is that the short story is a single incident affecting the life of a single character; while the novel is a series of incidents or descriptive pictures, introducing a number of persons who act upon each other. This "collision" of character forces in the novel is even more perfectly developed in the drama and makes what we call "plot."

Incidentally, the short story is an effort at condensation, the novel at expansion. A short story is like a cathedral viewed from a distant hill: the cathedral looks small in the perspective, and the outline and the general effect are the matters of chief importance. A novel, on the other hand, is like a cathedral viewed from the interior, where everything is large and spreading above us, and our interest is taken up chiefly with details. A short story describes an incident of history or of life, and the more different it is from the common experiences of the writer the better: for example peasant life, sailor life, thieves' life—any life with which the writer and his readers would not be willing to identify themselves but in which they can take a curious interest. A novel is more often in the nature of a confession, revealing the heart of the author. At any rate in the novel the writer must sympathize with his characters, while

in a short story it is not necessary, the only requirement being that the incident and characters be striking and intellectually stimulating to the curiosity.

Novel-writing is no such definite art as short story writing has become. Its range seems to be wider than that of any other form of literature, and it combines many of the elements of the drama, the epic poem, and the prose essay, and may even introduce the lyric poem in what is called "prose poetry" or "impassioned prose." The proportions of each element, or the presence or absence of any one of them, has not yet been determined. It would seem that any man or woman with a good command of free and native English, a heart overflowing with sympathy and mind filled to the brim with thoughts about human nature, has only to sit down and write a novel without any thought of the form. Form is being studied, however, and is much more an essential element to-day than in the time of Scott or Thackeray; and no doubt in time the novel will become as definite a form of art as any other.*

The one thing that especially distinguishes the great novelists is that they have been creators of characters who become in time as real to us as historic characters; and it would seem that a novel is remembered in proportion to the great-

*For a review of the art of novel writing as it has been so far developed, see "A Study of Prose Fiction" by Bliss Perry, and "Poe's Best Poems and Essays."

ness and permanent human interest of its characters. It therefore follows that no writer can be a successful novelist in whom sympathy with humanity does not exceed intellectual or scientific curiosity. Bacon, Macaulay, De Quincey, Matthew Arnold, Huxley, or Spencer, could not have succeeded as novelists, great writers though they were, because the intellectual, critical, scientific side, of their minds predominated over the emotional and sympathetic. Passionate love is the novelist's key to the Temple of Fame; or if not passionate love, then tender liking and perfect sympathy with the men and women he would portray, especially sympathy with their struggles, their successes, and their failures. Of course, if that love is mastered, and tempered with wisdom and sound judgment, so much the better. Add to love and good judgment an easy and effective style, acquired by a long and wide study of the best models of prose and poetry, and there you have a novelist. With such an equipment, there is little need to study a book on novel-writing. Without it, the book on novel-writing will certainly fail to make a novel-writer. So long as novel-writing is so broad and indeterminate an art, the best one can do is to study literature and literary construction and composition in their broadest phases.

CHAPTER IV.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION.

The Drama.

We have seen something of the method of constructing the plots of short stories. Novels do not have as perfect plots as either short stories or plays, largely, perhaps, because the art of novel-writing is still somewhat imperfectly developed, but also because the way in which novels are read does not necessitate so well shaped a plot.

The essential element of plot-construction is that the interest should increase steadily from the beginning to the end. A good plot is a perfect illustration of climax, and the principle of climax as against anti-climax is an important principle of all writing, from the sentence to a complete novel or play.

The climax of a plot has two phases, the climax proper and the catastrophe. The climax proper is the point of greatest intensity of interest, a little after the middle, when the motives of the characters are revealed; the catastrophe is the crash of material elements resulting from the motives that have been revealed. The so called climax proper is largely theoretical, and the ordinary reader does not make any special note of it. In theory the emotional strain is relaxed, and the excitement tapers off to the end, so that we should be left in about the condition that the

beginning of the reading found us. In practice the catastrophe is the only climax that is recognized, and the descent to earth is very easily accomplished in the few scenes that follow the revelation of the dramatic climax or catastrophe.

There are two recognized methods of plot-construction. One consists in concealing the nature of the catastrophe until the end. It is the method of all detective stories and mystery novels and plays. This method furnishes an easy plan for maintaining the interest, it is simple, and it is widely practised. The method of revealing the catastrophe in general terms at the beginning throws on the characters and the details of the development, the whole burden of keeping the reader interested. It is the method of all great artistic writing, and is well exemplified in Shakespeare's tragedies and most of his comedies.

Poe's "Gold-Bug" will furnish the best example of a perfectly devised mystery plot. It will be seen at a glance that the secret of his success lies largely in fixing the attention of the reader on the gold-bug, which has only the most incidental relation to the real story. Confidence men make use of this principle in picking your pocket; but it is none the less a valuable and useful one. The mind is incapable of thinking of more than one thing at a time. If the attention is fixed on one thing, other things going on all around are overlooked and ignored.

In Poe's story what may be called the catastrophe, namely, the discovery of the treasure,

comes in the middle of the story, while the intellectual climax, or the revelation of the way in which the cipher was read, comes at the end. However, when we examine the whole plot carefully we see that Poe's only interest was in the method by which the cipher was read, and the incidents described serve only to create a profound interest in the reader as a preparation for a discussion of the cipher reading. An essay on cipher-reading would have been viewed with scorn; Poe's story of "The Gold-Bug" is classic.

The general method of constructing detective stories is simple—much simpler than it seems. The writer begins at the conclusion, and decides on what his detective is going to discover; then he goes backward, carefully arranging his signs. When all is in readiness he begins to write. His detective, with an air of mystery, is introduced and brought to the first sign. Of course, since it has been placed there for him to see, he sees it. After a thing is discovered, it is easy to assign many reasons why it should be as it is, and the imaginary detective has little difficulty in assigning many excellent reasons. So he goes on until he solves the prearranged mystery. Writing detective stories implies no special shrewdness or penetrative insight on the part of the writer. I confronted with a real mystery he would be as helpless as any one else.

Stockton in "The Lady or the Tiger?" creates a very dramatic situation simply by leading the way to two equally possible conclusions. There is

nothing in his story that presupposes the appearance at the door of the tiger any more than the appearance of the lady, or the lady any more than the tiger. The burden of solution is thrown wholly on the reader, and the reader will solve the problem in the way his own feelings dictate. The value and object of the story consist in thus compelling the reader to make a personal analysis of the whole situation, an operation in which he takes interest and which is worth his effort.

This concrete illustration suggests a universal principle in all dramatic construction: it is that drama, and indeed all literature, exists far more for the purpose of making the reader think for himself, than of teaching him by direct precept or example. No plot is successful which rouses no original thought on the part of the reader, and it is this original thought which really interests and amuses him. It is therefore a great mistake artistically and in every way to say too much. Yet enough must be said to enable the reader to do the rest. Evidently a profound knowledge of the mind of the reader, its powers, and capabilities, is quite as important in literary construction as direct knowledge of the subject-matter presented. Lack of that knowledge is the reason for the common failure of the scientific man when he tries to write; and the possession of it accounts for the success of the superficial writer, who knows little, but understands so well how to make that little count through his knowledge of the mind and characteristics of the reader.

Let us now consider the construction of an artistic play, like "Romeo and Juliet," which will aptly illustrate all forms of higher plot construction.

The prologue gives a brief outline of the plot before the dramatic action begins at all, so that the possibility of mystery is dispelled at once.

In the construction of the play itself, we observe first a universal principle: If the thought is high or involved, the mind of the reader must be prepared for it, and worked up to a proper degree of intensity of thought and feeling in order that the reader may be capable of understanding the deeper motives and subtler elements of the theme. In short, the reader or spectator must be induced to fix his attention fully upon the play. To give time for this, and to accomplish it, inferior characters are first introduced on the stage, and the way is gradually prepared for the more dramatic entrance of the principal or really important characters. In a play there can be no such thing as anti-climax: everything must tend upward, toward a point of more intense interest, at least until the sympathies of the reader have been obtained past his recall.

The play is divided into five acts, each act ending with a climax. The interval of rest between the acts, together with the change of subject, permit each succeeding act to begin on a more commonplace level, but one dramatically higher than the preceding, and the whole character of the act should be more intense, until the end of the third

act, when the reader's or spectator's interest in the plot development will carry him successfully to the conclusion.

In the first act of "Romeo and Juliet" we have a full presentation of the causes which lead to the catastrophe—the quarrel of the two houses of Montague and Capulet, and the love of Romeo for Juliet and Juliet for Romeo in the face of that deadly quarrel. The act ends with the revelation of this love.

The second act must necessarily show us the way in which the love develops. It is the love act of the play, including the famous balcony scene, and ending with the marriage of Romeo and Juliet. This phase of the subject is here fully presented and is an episode complete in itself.

But the basis of the dramatic conclusion or catastrophe lies in the quarrel of the two families, and in the third act we return directly to that, holding our breath to see how it will affect the fate of Romeo and Juliet. Clearly we must now see the heart of the plot, the motives which cause the catastrophe must be distinctly revealed. The first motive is presented in the first scene, in which Romeo kills Tybalt, as a result of which he is banished. But Romeo will not submit tamely. The second motive is found in the effort to compel Juliet to marry Paris. Clearly she cannot do it and remain an honest woman. The act ends with a positive declaration of her determination to resist, and the last words are, "If all else fail, myself have power to die." In that final word

the catastrophe is foreshadowed. With the help of the prologue we are now in possession of the whole plot, except the working out of the details.

The details become themselves highly dramatic in the fourth act, since the plan suggested by Friar Laurence results in the apparent death of Juliet. The act seems to end with an anti-climax in the jesting of the musicians and Peter. The fact is, however, that this levity suggests to the reader or spectator that the ruse has been successful, and he becomes accordingly interested in finding out how it can go wrong. His mind is too much tired out for great thoughts: he must be occupied with lesser ones which are yet sufficient to hold his attention fully.

The fifth act gives the catastrophe as briefly as possible.

A few observations on the construction of separate acts will suggest some essential principles.

First, the act should not be so long as to weary the reader too much. If it does, his capacity for thinking and being interested will be destroyed for the time being and he will lose most of the details until he has become rested. This principle accounts for the intervals between the acts. Moreover, the reader or spectator uses his brain a part at a time, so to speak, just as in physical exercise we use one set of muscles, and then another. Each act tires but one set of mental muscles, and the following act should as far as possible call into activity a fresh set. So the subjects of succeeding acts are as different as possible.

Second, still further to rest the spectator or reader, comic relief is introduced. It causes relaxation of the strain of attention. Pure tragedy would overstrain the mind. Likewise in a comedy, in which relaxation is the order throughout, more serious passages are introduced, for the purpose of relief and contrast.

Third, relief is secured throughout by variety in the characters, the dialogue, and the changing atmosphere of the play.

The whole purpose of the play is to rouse the feelings and sympathies, and then to suggest problems which will be food for thought on the part of those who have become interested.

It is obvious that poetic beauty in a tragedy will usually be found in fullest measure in the early part of the play,—that is, before the end of the third act, and preferably in the second act, since after the dramatic climax the mind of the auditor is too tired to grasp anything modestly beautiful. In a comedy the reverse is often the case, and we have some of our most beautiful poetry near the end of "The Merchant of Venice," since the mind is now aroused and is glad to be given subjects for more serious thought.

In order to produce climax and catastrophe, we must have two or more contending forces. Their collision produces intensity of interest in exactly the same way that the collision of two rocks produces fire. The resulting excitement or interest will depend on the force of the colliding characters. In tragedy the characters are in deadly

earnest, and the result is death, physical or mental, or at any rate revolution. Mere change of circumstances as the result of the collision constitutes what is popularly called "simple drama." When the collision produces happiness, the collision being easy and harmless, we have comedy. When the result is highly absurd, we have farce. In all there must be what is technically called "collision."

Evidently a drama consists in the action and reaction of various forces. These forces are human motives—a motive being that which causes motion. This subject will be more fully discussed in a separate chapter. Success in dramatic construction consists in securing a perfect balance of the various forces; and the more powerful the forces are, provided balance is secured, the greater is the dramatist.

CHAPTER V.

MOTIVE.

Every story is more or less a study of human motive. In a law court it is understood that a knowledge of the motive is necessary in order to establish a crime. This involves the conclusion that no human act can be rightly understood without the motive which led to it as well as the deed itself. In a story of mystery the motive, or original cause, is looked for, but proves veiled. A mystery story is valuable, however, in proportion to the investigation into the motive or com-

elling cause of the action. The word *motive* is commonly used of acts of human beings, but in a broader sense it may be used to designate the determining cause of any action.

In English it is used in a much more restricted sense than we have indicated here, and hence the French word *motif* has come into use in this connection to designate that wider significance of the English word when employed in the technical sense. The *motif* of a story is the idea, force, whatever it may be, which makes the action possible: it is the compelling force behind everything.

One of the great failings of young writers is that they do not seize the *motif* of a story at the start, and indeed they do not bring it out at all except by implication. The important element of every story is its *motif*, and this must be brought out clearly in the opening sentences, or within a page or two. Time, place, and circumstances must be indicated in some way first, with a little designation of the chief character. All this may be accomplished in a single word, at most in a sentence or two. Then the author should take hold of the *motif*, or the motive which makes the man act, or the force which brought about the catastrophe, whatever it was, and this must be clearly explained. There can be no vital interest in the story until it is explained. There are many ways of explaining it, or making it clear, among others the mere atmosphere of the language used. To illustrate, let us examine the *motif* of some typical stories.

"The Necklace" is a story about vanity, and this is indicated in the third paragraph, which begins, "She suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born for all the delicacies and all the luxuries." In "A Piece of String" the first six paragraphs are introductory description, but in the seventh paragraph we have the peculiar actions of Maitre Hauchecorne when he picks up the piece of string, which gives a glimpse into his character in a way to show what element of his nature brought about the catastrophe.

In a story that is a miniature drama, like most of Maupassant's, the *motif* corresponds with the actuating motive of the chief character. But in stories of a descriptive nature we must look for the *motif* elsewhere. In Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert" the introductory paragraphs state that the story is to be an illustration of how animals are tamed, and the word "passion" in the title of the story, as well as a chance remark of the narrator that animals may be taught all the vices of civilization, make it clear at once that the *motif* of the story is the taming power of passion, or feeling, on an animal. In Dickens's "A Child's Dream of a Star," we find the *motif* in the second paragraph, which states clearly the fancy that nature—for instance, a star—sympathizes with the sorrows of man. This fancy, perhaps (and perhaps not) a figure of speech representing God's sympathy for man, becomes the determining force in the story. In the "Gold-Bug" we find the determining force which makes the story

to be contained in the cipher, which first comes to our attention as a scrap of paper, on which a death's head appears in place of a drawing illustrating a beetle. The desire to solve the mystery, both on the part of Legrand and of the reader, creates the interest.

But not only must every story and other work of literary art have its *motif*, but every act must have its motive clearly indicated. The writer should ceaselessly ask the question, Did this man or that woman have a sufficient motive for doing this or that deed?

When the would-be author considers that in order to write with genius he must so thoroughly understand human nature that he will know exactly what and how great a motive is necessary for every act of every person under any given circumstances, then the enormous requirements are clearly apparent. Even the best of writers fail constantly in this matter of understanding how much motive or how little corresponds to a given act, and they fail of the highest success just in proportion to that. But to succeed at all a writer must be constantly striving toward perfect knowledge.

For instance, it means nothing to give a description of how one man knocked another down unless the reason for his doing so is also clearly explained. To tell how a man met a woman on the street and kissed her is ridiculous unless some motive is given. More than this, the motive must be exactly proportioned to the act, and nicely cal

culated for the nature. A person of reserve would have to be given a much stronger motive for any overt act than an unrestrained, impulsive person. Human nature works on just the same principles as physical nature: to drive a nail into hard wood requires more force than to drive it into soft wood, and when one attempts to drive a nail into a granite rock, the nail is bent or broken without entering at all. The skilled carpenter calculates with great precision just what blows are required, and he never tries to drive a nail where it will not go. The same skill and precision should be used by the writer when he tries to drive human souls: he must apply exactly the right amount of motive.

To determine this question of motive, a great deal of careful thinking is required, and this requirement is the reason why so much time is needed for the development in the author's own mind of the story which he gets first in the form of a plain narrative of facts. It is always necessary for him to think out all the motives. This involves thinking out with great precision the exact nature of the character, for motive must be perfectly proportioned to resistance, that is to character and also to circumstance. Training, education, atmosphere, personality, social conditions, are all elements in this matter of a nice adjustment of action and reaction, of motive and act, of *motif* and catastrophe.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT MAKES A STORY WORTH TELLING.

The editor of one of the large magazines recently remarked to the writer that the difficulty with the great mass of the stories sent him was not in lack of power to tell, but in the lack of something worth telling. The stories were nearly all well written commonplaces. The present time is peculiarly fitted to call out commonplace stories that are well written, rather than strong stories that are poorly written, as was the case half a century ago. Many of the stories actually printed in the magazines are so commonplace they are not worth telling, and are not materially better than hundreds that are rejected. They are usually written by persons who have before written stories with valuable ideas in them, stories well worth telling, and the editor in accepting the commonplace story by the same author assumes that if the author wrote one or more good stories, the present story must in some way be worth telling, and he admits it to the pages of his magazine without actually judging it as he judges all the stories of a beginner. But that he admits the commonplace compositions of a writer of reputation is certainly no reason why he should admit the commonplace compositions of a beginner, as many beginners seem to think. They say, "My story was just as good as that one: why didn't he accept mine as well as that one?" To be sure,

your story may have been just as good as that one by a well known writer, and still there may have been no reason why your story or his should ever have been written; and if his worthless story had the misfortune to be printed, it is no reason why you should not regard it as good fortune that your worthless story was not printed. We know it is rather a difficult philosophy to regard it as a piece of good fortune when you fail to get into print, but that is often the truth.

It is assumed that any one who aspires to learn the art of creative composition will have had a good English education, will be able to write grammatically, to punctuate, and to express himself with considerable freedom and fluency. If also he has mastered the principles of structure he will then be able to write sufficiently well to make his work acceptable as far as the form is concerned. In the present chapter we wish to consider what is necessary as to matter to make a literary undertaking worth doing.

In the first place, a writer must be in touch with the thought and feeling of the public at any given time. What was good work fifty years ago is not likely to be good now. It may have lasting elements, but those would be due to genius, a thing we are not now considering especially. To-day there is a certain list of topics which a large number of people are thinking about, and concerning which they wish information. On the side of these subjects they are especially susceptible. A story may be told merely to amuse and

not to give information; still the principle holds good, for, except in the directions that they are vitally interested, people are not sufficiently susceptible even to appreciate a good joke.

To start with, then, the young writer must be familiar with the topics of life that are uppermost in the public mind; still more, he must be in touch with the mood that is predominant. When the public is very serious, as it is when it has been stirred up about some great question of public policy, it wants a more or less serious story, and frivolity repels. On the other hand, when a reaction from its serious mood has come, a frivolous story pleases it most, and a serious one is an abomination. But each writer must realize all these things for himself. Stories of provincial life, studies of different parts of the country, have been much in fashion. But the keen observer will see the signs of the times and not insist on writing provincial stories when cosmopolitan ones are about to come chiefly into demand.

In a book of this nature we cannot undertake to put the inexperienced writer into touch with the public as it actually is. He must do that for himself. But if he would work effectively he must gain this touch, to some extent, at least. If what he writes is worth anything, it must help the public to think out the problems which are actually before it. Humorous light on the problem is just as valuable as any other, and at the back of amusement we nearly always find some

serious substance. So in whatever light you regard creative composition, the point of view from which success comes is the serious one of helping the public to think out some problem in which it is interested, or at least to throw light, whether red, green, or white, on the topics that are uppermost.

Lest the reader may take the statement of the case too seriously, let us give an illustration of a general kind. The public is always interested in love in some phase or other. But a love story which tells of a courtship after the old-fashioned, conventional, stiff manner, would be very dull indeed as compared with an artistic account of a modern affair of the heart.

What people like best is to know of something that falls in naturally with their own lives, and consciously or unconsciously helps them in a practical way to live. Unless it really touches their interests it counts for little. Simply to tell about something you know, however well you do it, is worth little unless your reader is also interested in it. If he knows all you have to tell him before he begins your story, he naturally finds it a bore. At the same time, if he does not know anything about it, he is likely not to care to know anything. What he wants is something that just fits his own case, or falls in with something he has been thinking about. If he has been thinking about old coins or dead men's bones, these subjects may form the basis of a story that will interest him, just as a story about a practical love

affair will interest him if he happens to have a love affair in hand himself.

If the writer wishes to interest the public (which is the meaning of success in writing), he writes about the things the public is interested in, and not only this, but he tells something fresh or suggestive about these topics or he holds his peace. If any writer can say any practical thing, in a story or out of it, that any considerable number of persons would be interested to know, he can safely write, and feel more or less sure that he will get into print. If he merely writes for the sake of writing, he does not deserve to get into print.

There are some persons who write largely for the public who have nothing whatever to say, but who have a clear way of saying nothing. A story may be beautiful for its style, which, however, means simply that there is something in the fresh way of saying the old thing which actually throws a glimmer of light on it. Also a story that has merely a situation which strikes the reader as new, different from any he has met before, may be worth printing. As a general thing the stories currently printed have only *one* point of real value, but a story to be worth anything must be out of the ordinary in at least one particular. A unique style, one that either stimulates, rasps, or charms may be the one thing; a new situation may be the one thing; a new character may be the one thing; a little bit of original philosophy of life may be the one thing.

But the author must know just what that one thing is, and bend all his energies to make it tell. To write a story and hope it may have one good point is not enough. The chances are a million to one against it. The writer must know enough of the reader to know what will interest or help or amuse him. This knowledge of the public and what it wants is the one great secret of successful writing. It is a fine and delicate knowledge, and has to be gained chiefly by experience and experiment. Publishers themselves understand it very little, for they can seldom tell how a new book will sell. Magazine editors know the kind of thing that has proved successful so far in their magazines, and confine themselves closely to what they know, not venturing very much on new things. The young writer who is to be successful must discover something new and useful by experimenting himself, and when he has found it he will keep close to his original line if he wishes to keep on succeeding. It is much like a miner striking a vein of valuable ore, whether gold, silver, or lead. He does not make any money until he has found his vein of ore, and then he knows he will not make much more unless he sticks to that vein till it is exhausted. Of course, every vein gives out in time, in story-writing as in mining. Then the author will have to give up writing or find a new vein, but he should not abandon his old vein until it is worked to the end.

It has been our observation that men most

often take a good theme which they treat badly, and women a poor theme which they treat well. We do not know exactly how the experiment would work in practice, but it has always seemed a plausible plan to suppose that a man and a woman, if they sympathized with each other, could write a story together very much better than either could write alone. In such collaboration the man should make the plot, furnish the general philosophy of life, and work out the practical details of construction. In this sphere he should have full rein. Then the woman should write the story in her own way, since she is almost invariably superior in taste, delicacy, and truth of expression.

However this may be, it still remains that the great bulk of the unpublished work of women is excessively commonplace in subject, and the great bulk of the unpublished work of men is crude in expression. Women are, nevertheless, well adapted to writing short stories, but the one essential criticism that can be passed on the greater part of the unsuccessful attempts of women is that their work is hopelessly commonplace. There are women who have just the opposite fault, but they are few. That a tendency to be commonplace is a general fault of the sex we do not assert, though the fact that women doubtless have a narrower range than their brothers accounts for a part of it. A certain school has drilled it into the minds of all would-be writers that nothing is too trivial or commonplace to be made the

subject of a story. There is some truth in this point of view, for if one can extract a new idea from a most trivial and commonplace incident, as Maupassant often does, he may be considered a genius. But there are very few indeed who are geniuses, and those who are not geniuses try to extract something out of the small and trivial and succeed in getting only the commonplace and trite. You should write of the slight and trivial by all means if you can say something fresh and helpful and new about it. But if there is nothing valuable in the situation with which you start for your story, remember that you must put along with your trivial incident something strong, fresh and useful out of your own powerful hold on life. The grains of sand about which Maupassant forms his pearls are often poor, slight things, but the wealth of thought and feeling and knowledge of life which he adds to his grain of sand in each case are simply luxuriant in abundance, and came from long, careful, painful observation of life and from personal experience of an unusual breadth. The young writer, before presenting his work to the publisher, should be very certain that he has something to say or give to the reader which the reader can enjoy or use, and he must understand just how the reader is going to enjoy or use it. Unless he can see this and understand it, he should not believe that he has any call to write stories. Moreover, it is not enough to know that the story when told orally has interested some one. It is infinitely easier to interest by speech

than through writing; so unless the story when told has a sort of electric interest it is not worth writing. Some people, of course, cannot tell a story half as well as they can write it; but they can imagine the effect which would be produced if they could tell the story well in spoken words, and if when thus told they can see just how it would electrify the hearer with its interest, they may know it is a story worth writing. But unless a story will interest the hearer very unusually, one may be pretty certain it is not likely to interest the reader at all. Of course there is the possible interest excited by a written style; but a skillful style is acquired only by long, tedious practice, except in the very rarest instances, and one cannot fancy his style will count for anything until he has had some years of practical experience with writing that has actually been published. So after all there is no real exception to the general rule for the young writer, that he must have something new and fresh or useful to say to the reader.

CHAPTER VII

HOW TO OBSERVE MEN AND WOMEN.

Although the study of character has no bearing on literary art as art, it is a matter of great practical importance to the man or woman who would write: hence we may be pardoned a word as to the best method of studying character.

In going about observing men and women, it is indispensable that the student of human nature should classify, and the best method of classifying those you see is by comparison with friends you know well. You know a fine old gentleman, a lovely, unselfish woman, a selfish, disagreeable woman, etc. You have an ideal of childhood, of intellectuality, of stupidity, incarnate in some one you know. Take that person as in a way a type, and place him at the head of your classification. Then observe how often you find his leading characteristic in the thousands of others you may come in contact with in a year. This method of comparison leads you to separate characteristics from individuals, so that you can think of them as entities, as real, substantial things, though at first they seemed inseparable from the person in whom you had seen them. Not until you have seen the same characteristics in a great many persons do you come to know practically what a type is.

In all literary work the special and queer in human nature ought to be eliminated; for if you picture types, your characters should be essentially like a great many other men and women in the world. When you have looked at but one person you cannot be sure how much is peculiar to him alone and how much is broad human nature. In order to know what is broadly human you must have observed a great many.

But you may ask, When and where can one best observe human nature? The answer is, At

all times and under all circumstances. Watch the faces you meet in the street until you come to know just what the character of a stranger is by your first glance at his face, figure and general manner. Study the meaning of eyes, of voice, of gesture, as well as the meaning of the lines of the face. Short persons have certain qualities, tall persons certain others. Height, weight, color, correspond to an almost infinite number of mental characteristics. Do not leave these broad and obvious things out of sight in observing smaller and finer shades of character.

The chief mistake that the careful student of life makes is in becoming so absorbed in the very small and fine in character that he forgets all about the broad and obvious. It is much better to know well the broad and obvious than the fine and delicate, for if one is a shrewd observer of the larger things, he will be quite likely not to err in the smaller; but the reverse is not true.

The next step is in the study of human passions, and that observation must begin with one's own heart if one can be honest with one's self. How do your moods come and go? How does anger or joy or eagerness affect you? If you look carefully you will find yourself doing a thousand little things you were never before conscious of, and it is these little unconscious things which indicate the inward condition. To say that your heroine was proud and defiant is not half so effective as saying she tossed her head and stamped her foot, and her eyes flashed defiance.

A gesture, a glance, anything however small which one does unconsciously under stress, is significant and telling.

What people tell you about themselves is seldom to be taken seriously. No doubt they try to be honest, and no doubt they think they understand themselves: but the opinion of a man about one he has just met is infinitely more likely to be true than anything he may say about himself.

This suggests another point: it is difficult to analyse the character of an intimate friend. Look for real information as to human character in the first vivid impressions you receive from one you have never met before. The salient characteristics stand out then: those of your friend have been blunted in your mind by association and involved in a great confusion and complication, while in the case of a stranger you do not know too much to understand clearly. In writing it is seldom safe to write about things you know very well, because your store of information is so great it is difficult to choose from it. If you have a few vivid impressions they are more easily and satisfactorily handled in a story.

It is a trick of observers of life to see in others their own peculiar defects. This does not come from vanity, but is a sort of curious optical illusion or delusion, and we mention it here simply to impress the student with the fact that every observation to be valuable has to be corrected, so to speak; it must be examined to find out how much of the original impression was personal to

the observer and how much really was true. There is always a small amount of what may be called prejudice in every impression, however clear-minded and fair one may be, and when one comes to write, this personal element shows itself disastrously unless one is very much on one's guard.

Every writer ought to formulate for himself more or less completely a philosophy of life. He should arrange his thought about the universe into a system, so that he will have an opinion as to what God is, what love is, what the meaning of life is, what is to be looked into and known and what is to be left untouched by the human mind. The systematizing of all life may be very incomplete and impractical for any one but the particular owner of it; yet every writer ought to have a clear notion of just what he thinks about these things, in order to be perfectly steady in his delineation of motive. This philosophy of life will not be found in books or anywhere else outside of one's own mind. Each man must study it out for himself, but until he has come to some conclusion he is likely to have difficulty whenever he finds his characters in certain situations he has not fully considered. Just what the philosophy is, matters much less than that one should have a very definite notion of what it is in his particular case.

The most important point about successful character study, however, is patience. It cannot be forced, and it frequently works itself out in

the mind unconsciously. Certain impressions will lodge in your mind when you have seen some person, and not until weeks afterward will their presence be discovered. One cannot make a business of searching out these hidden things, for a search seldom reveals anything; but the natural processes of the desirous mind rarely leave anything hidden for ever. This is the reason why no man ought to make writing his sole business, at least until he is well advanced in the art. One gets observations in the ordinary course of everyday life, and the more unconscious one is, the more likely is he to get valuable impressions. A story grows in one's mind, too, far better when one's hands are engaged or one's mind is occupied in other directions. During the intervals of rest from business the mind takes up the realization of the character with freshness and eagerness. If the mind works on character study more than a very short time, it grows weary and nothing valuable can be accomplished.

One always gets the best opportunities for studying character in the ordinary routine of some steady employment, whether it be that of a clerk in his office or a woman in her social obligations. It is best to choose an employment, of course, in which one comes in contact with as many different people as possible, and it is also necessary to cultivate habits of sociability and sympathy with those about you if you are to draw out their real

characters. Sympathy, sincerity and honest eagerness are the very best tools one can have to open the treasure chests which contain the secrets of human life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEST OF ABILITY.

Two elements are needed for success in authorship: the chief is a thorough knowledge of the art of expression; the second, only less important, is an original talent, or sufficient personal qualifications. Many people will wonder why talent is put second and not first, for there is a popular impression that talent is pretty nearly everything. An old professor who was very wise and indeed very well known all the world over, used to say to his class that each one had mental power enough to create a revolution, though he were the dullest man of them all; and he would illustrate his proposition by saying that any man could learn by constant daily practice during a sufficient period to hold his body straight out at arms' length at right angles as he grasped one of the rungs of a ladder. Likewise, there are very few indeed who do not have some ideas worth expressing, if by sufficient study of the art they have learned to do it with force and effect.

It is always a question, however, how much work will be needed to accomplish the desired result, and the length of time that is needed, as well as the amount of effort, depends directly on

one's natural ability. It becomes a very important problem to test one's ability, to know just what it is, and whether it is worth developing in comparison with certain other talents. One should not waste time in learning to write if he can learn how to be a merchant easily and surely, and with greater success. It is the purpose of this chapter to offer a few suggestions of a purely practical kind looking in this direction.

First, let us say that no one, whatever his talent, should think of making his living by writing pure literature, that is by fiction, poetry, or essays. Most have not the talent to succeed to the extent that this requires, and those who have the talent are very likely to spoil it by putting such an enormous burden on their shoulders. Whatever may be said to the contrary, those who seek a literary life, even of the highest kind, will find it decidedly to their advantage to enter journalism, or take up some editorial work, or otherwise undertake the business side of literature before trying to enter the ideal side. Many will find that literature is best pursued as a side issue with some other business. There is no reason why journalism or editorial work or law should seriously interfere with success in creative writing: on the contrary, there is every reason in the world why, in the end, some such outside pursuit should aid very substantially one's success in pure literature, because such occupations open up the avenues by which we come to understand human nature, to realize life truly; or in other

words, these other pursuits enable us to accumulate in the best possible way the material we must use in making literature. The man (or woman) who devotes himself exclusively to literature is almost sure to become more or less morbid, and we venture to assert that the successful novelist of to-day who lives by his pen has (though he may tell you quite the contrary himself) a constant fight against morbidity, and one in which he is not always successful.

But having decided to devote a certain amount of one's time to writing of some sort, in most cases fiction, the young writer wishes to test his ability in some way. The simplest method is to go with one's work to a wise and sympathetic adviser, if you can find such a one, and let him tell you just what your strong points are and just what are your weak ones. With this knowledge you can easily make up your mind as to the amount of time necessary to cure your defects, and whether your gifts warrant the effort.

But a wise and sympathetic adviser is the rarest thing in the world to find. There are plenty of advisers, but most of them know still less about you than you know about yourself, and in addition they, for one reason or another, will not or cannot tell you what they know. As a matter of fact you must usually be your own adviser.

In order to test one's-self one must be honest, and what is more, sincerity is the first qualification for the writing of anything really valuable. The public loves sincerity; and for the sake of

sincerity will forgive almost any artistic defect.

Sincerity means truth of heart, both in reality and in portrayal, and good literature is that which represents the heart truly.

The first great gift which the young author should covet is, then, sincerity, and for two reasons: first, it is one great talent (yes, a real *talent*, perhaps *genius*); second, it is an absolute requisite for testing one's abilities.

Many will doubtless pass over this hastily, but the truth still remains that it is the first and chief qualification for success in writing, and few are they who possess it in any marked degree.

The second qualification, the qualification which the man or woman who really sets out honestly to examine himself will look for, is the ability to follow a train of thought without outside aids. Many people can talk well, even brilliantly; but when alone they will not be able to think continuously or effectively. Some people would call this power imagination, but the ability to think in images is not necessarily requisite to writing successfully. The writer who would succeed must have the habit of thinking, however, and people who do not like to meditate, whether in a dreamy and far-away fashion, or in a purely practical and business-like fashion, will not be likely to write with any considerable power. Letter-writing as a gift usually goes with the ability to think, but sometimes those who do not like to write letters have a literary ability.

The third requisite for becoming a successful

writer is the gift of language. We have mentioned this last of all because it is really the least important, strange as this may seem. Language can be acquired, but sincerity and meditateness are very difficult of acquisition. We know a young man who until he was twenty appeared to lack the gift of language almost entirely, and thought this a fatal impediment to his becoming a successful writer. He set himself to acquire what command of words he could, however, and in the end became eminently proficient. Of course some people gain a command of language much more easily than others; but all must learn, and the brightest and dullest alike have the task of acquisition to be accomplished before they can be proficient.

To test one's command of language, one may first inquire whether one is a ready letter-writer or not. This is a vague test, for some people write voluminous letters who have not large command of language, and some people who have a command of language never write long letters. Yet these are exceptions to the rule that if one is a ready letter-writer one has a good command of language, and if one is not, that command is probably lacking as a natural gift. Letter-writing, however, does not indicate in any way one's acquired proficiency in the use of language, which comes only from long and thoughtful reading. If one has not done a very large amount of careful, thoughtful reading of the best literature he is not likely to have a trained style, however voluminously he may have written.

Verse-making is an admirable way of cultivating one's use of words, for it necessitates a great variety of expressive phrases as well as individual words for rhyming and so forth, and is strongly recommended for practice and as a test.

Another good test of one's command of language, and also a good exercise, is to sit down quietly and alone after some interesting experience or observation and write out a description of it. If one is really interested in the subject, the writing should be easy and expressive. Never try to write a description of anything which does not interest you, however, for unless you have a genuine interest there will be no test. A description of a conversation is a good test of one's power to write dialogue.

Having sincerity, the meditative habit, and a good command of language, one ought to be able to write in some way or other with real success. It is still an open question, however, what style of writing one should choose.

The simplest form of composition is essay-writing, and it is a fact that nearly all great novelists, and indeed prose writers of all kinds, have begun with essay-writing—for instance, writing book reviews for a local newspaper, or short articles describing some curious or interesting event, or little studies of interesting personalities. This is not essay-writing in the technical sense of the word: it is perhaps more accurately termed sketching in words. The artist begins to make outlines first, then draws careful pictures in

black and white, and finally paints an elaborate picture in colors.

When one has mastered sketch-writing (and no young author should think for a moment of leaping at once into the finished work, though almost all do just this) he will wish to find out whether he has the ability to write an artistic story. To ascertain this, let him ask first whether he understands the meaning of human motive, for fiction is a study of motive. If he has a deep and decided interest in human motive, he may probably become a writer of short stories or artistic fiction of some kind. Stories may be written in an essay style or the conversational style, and one should next determine one's powers in this particular. People with vivid imaginations will write character studies well, those with a philosophic turn of mind will write stories in the narrative, descriptive, essay style, but in any case a story ought to be a study of motive.

The style that one can write most easily is the best style to cultivate. Many people think that what they do well and naturally and easily is a fault rather than otherwise. This is not the case, however, and if one has a particular facility for conversation, or character study, or philosophic writing, he should cultivate it, restraining it when it becomes excessive and burdensome to be sure, but never giving it up as altogether bad. It is much better to learn to curb one's natural tendencies than to create new abilities.

The secret of arriving at a satisfactory knowl-

edge of one's abilities is to begin at a definite point and proceed from point to point. Ask first if you are quite honest with yourself; then follow in order with the other questions we have proposed, making tests of various kinds until you are satisfied in your own mind. Study each point thoroughly, in order to find out whether you surely lack or surely possess a gift, and then consider whether you can by study and effort develop the lacking quality, or had best pursue some line in which it is not required. This habit of self-examination will not only give you trustworthy and necessary information about yourself; but it will develop that habit of mental investigation which is at the foundation of all valuable character study.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

But the rules of art must be forgotten before art can prove effective. There are two perfect artists, the innocent and unconscious child (who is but the hand of divine intelligence), and the trained man of letters to whom art has become a second nature. Art is after all but a means. It should be the fluid medium through which heart speaks to heart. Literature is for the heart to live by—if you would know its end and mission. If you would make others live, you must live yourself—yes, and die. You must coin your heart's blood into the universal coin of the realm

of heart, so transmuting your pain into life for others. If you do that, art becomes but a paltry thing in comparison—indeed, it is only the *way* in which you perform your alchemy. *Art is a means, never an end*, and “Art for art’s sake,” or “*L’Art pour l’art*,” as they call it more appropriately, is dilettanteism pure and simple. Dilettanteism may be a very good thing on occasion, but it is not for the dilettante that the practical instructions of this little book have been intended.

Rules may be applied to a subject before it is understood or mastered in order to get at the heart of the matter; and they may be applied to a work of art after it is finished in order to test it and discover how to correct it. But while one is constructing, while one is actually writing, rules are the most fatal thing to have in mind. This fact has no doubt been the great barrier to the existence of any formulation of the principles of literary art by actual literary artists. But though the athlete must not think of dumb-bells and horizontal bars and his trainer when he is performing feats of dexterity on the trapeze a hundred feet above the ground, it would be utterly fatal for him to attempt anything dangerous or difficult without having first gone through all this conscious, painful training. Likewise with the literary artist: self-consciousness during the actual performance of the feat of writing is the most dangerous thing in the world; but there is no surer way of escaping it than by submitting first to a rigorous course of self-conscious preparation.

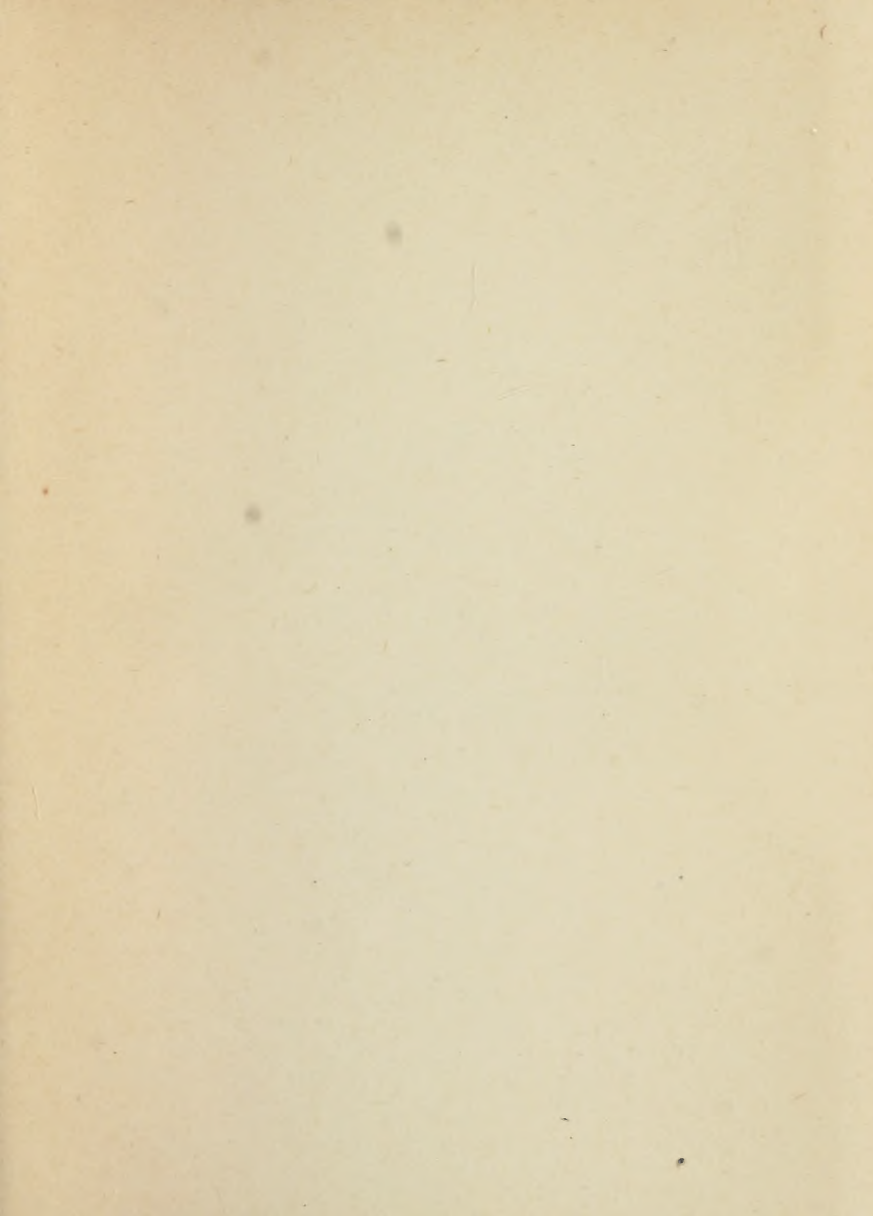
Self-consciousness is sure to come sooner or later, and it must be met and overcome if failure is not deliberately to be invited. What safer plan is there than to meet it at once and systematically, and fortify one's art so thoroughly that there can be no surprises or unlooked for difficulties?

But as we said in the beginning, Art must become unconscious before it can be useful. "A *little* knowledge is a dangerous thing." The creative writer should master his art or abandon it.

Edited by Sherwin Cody

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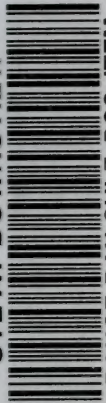
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